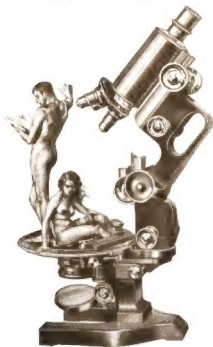


*SHORT
STORY
COLLECTION*



WILLIAM WARD PRESOTT

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DAY-BOOKS



DAY-BOOKS

BY MABEL E. WOTTON

'... chronicles of good and evil

LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST

BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1896



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TO MRS. WILFRID MEYNELL

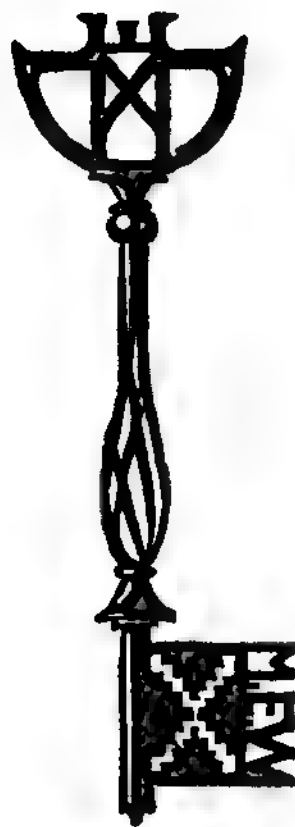
*I knew you then as strangers know :
The printed page still held between
Your face and mine. I could but guess
What noble phrasing garbed of good ;
Could dream a perfect womanhood
Of high intent, and gracious mien ;
But not, ah ! not your tenderness.*

*I know you now as friends may know.
The shadows darkened in the days,
(Poor days that God still deigned to bless),
And you, on whom I had no claim,
You read unspoken hopes, and came
When lips were wrung and dim the gaze,
And thus I learned your tenderness.*

*I know you, as the angels know
The kindly deeds you fain would hide.
So of your charity no less
Than of your love, I pray you take
This token for our friendship sake,
(Without which friendship hope had died),
Of gratitude for tenderness.*

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MORRISON'S HEIR

A DECEMBER afternoon, cold and clammy. So thoroughly disagreeable a day that, when with the first touch of twilight a drizzling rain began falling, the policeman on duty at the upper end of Pall Mall seemed to have the deserted pavements entirely to himself. The sentry on guard at Marlborough House had sensibly withdrawn into his box, and the crossing-sweeper at the corner had given up business as hopeless, and had retired for the day. Only the swift roll of an occasional carriage, and the patter of horses' feet through the mud and slush broke the silence, and a girl who was sheltering in a hospitable doorway began vaguely wondering how it was that the discomfort of her surroundings could still have power to affect her. She had believed herself incapable of any thought other than of her own misery, and of what Dick would say, and it was a positive relief to her to feel that her wet garments were clinging round her ankles.



She hated it so much, and the little pools of water which had dripped from the folds of her umbrella, that the hatred seemed to humanise her, and bring her more within touch of her fellows and their commonplace annoyances. Probably the guard opposite was longing for dry clothing and a fireside as much as she. Perhaps the policeman was thinking wistfully of his home, and No, not that. The dulled look came back to her face. She had nothing in common with other people except just the weather ; she must keep to that. But the sentry must dislike this rain and cold, and so did she, she told herself with childish reiteration.

‘Are yer waitin’ for a ’bus? None run along ’ere ; leastways, not so ’igh up, ma’am.’

The ‘ma’am’ was jerked out involuntarily, and possibly more in deference to her clothes than to the pale scared face. For they were handsome clothes, and, to the practised eyes watching her, their wearer was evidently unaccustomed to what the man chose to consider was a questionable position.

‘Is’nt it a ’bus yer waiting for?’ he repeated.

The girl shrank farther back into the entry.

‘Oh no, I know, thank you,’ she said, hur-

riedly. 'I have an appointment. I'm rather early; I am waiting here.'

The policeman growled something she did not catch, and turning on his heel recommenced his beat. It was nothing to him if she stood there until the shop-people closed up their doorway, but he would have been willing to make a small bet, had there been anyone there to take him, that no one would arrive to keep that appointment with her. It was the happy-go-lucky, satisfied-looking women, as far as his experience went, with whom appointments were kept, not miserable creatures who would probably burst into tears by way of a welcome.

So he was considerably astonished when, having tramped back again and arrived within sight of her, he found she had left her refuge, and was ringing at a bell a few houses down. He had never known Mr. Richard Morrison to have mysterious callers before, and it was undoubtedly a compliment to that young man that he paused a moment to see if she were admitted.

'Is he in?' he heard her ask, in the same breathless fashion in which she had answered his information about the omnibus.

'Who, miss?' asked the stolid man-servant.

'Mr. Morrison. He . . he is expecting me. He said I was to wait if he were not in.'

The man hesitated, apparently undecided as to whether he should admit her. Then the pretty, expensive clothes appeared to appeal to him as they had appealed to the policeman, and he opened the door to a more hospitable angle.

'Certainly, miss. Will you please come upstairs. Mr. Morrison will probably be in by six o'clock, and it is past five now. What name shall I say, miss?'

He piloted the visitor to a sitting-room on the first floor, and began busying himself with lighting the lamp, glancing at her covertly the while. He did not mind her coming, but he did mind her faltering attempt at falsehood, and he considered himself ill-used that she had stooped to an unconvincing lie, instead of rising to bribery.

'Shall I give my master any message, miss?'

'No,' said the girl, sharply, and with greater decision than she had yet shown. 'He expects me, I tell you.'

Her apathy had died under the open curiosity in the man's eyes. She felt an insane desire to make Dick rid himself of him on the spot, for fear she should ever see him again.

'And don't light the lamp; I prefer the twilight. If I want you I will ring.'

The man pursed his lips as he closed the door upon her. Dick Morrison's reputation had trembled at the wondering stare of No. 10001; it shattered under that muffled whistle.

Left to herself the girl began pacing restlessly about the room. She wanted to find some trace of herself, or if that had been put away, as indeed it seemed likely it would have been put away during these past months, then perhaps to gain some inkling of whether or not she might expect to find him changed.

Not much, apparently. The photographs of his mother and sister still fronted each other upon the mantelpiece; a couple of the quarterlies lay upon the table; two letters, ready for the post, were with them, and, stooping, she read the addresses in his clear, rather peculiar hand. One was to the secretary of the Charity Organisation, and the other to his bailiff at Oaksdene, the little Bedfordshire estate. She felt instinctively sure of the contents of those letters,—one representing much personal effort, and a sublime belief in proper channels and authority generally, and the other instructions

and receipts. But no other pictures, or litter of papers anywhere. No, he was not much changed.

The room grew darker, and the gas-lamps in the roadway sent two great cross beams of light from the window to the shut folding-doors which faced it.

The girl ceased her restless pacing, and pulling a big easy chair to the sullen fire, sat staring into it. This waiting was horrible. She tried to pray once that Dick might come quickly, and then stopped and shivered. She had not said her prayers for three days now, not since she had learnt the truth, and she knew it would be useless even to make the attempt, until she knew what Dick would say. Everything in her life hinged upon that now.

The coals fell together with a crash, and she half leaped from her seat. Oh, why didn't he come? It wasn't like Dick to keep her in suspense. Perhaps the servant had made a mistake, and he would go on to dinner straight from his club, or wherever he was, and in that case . . . Well, in that case she could only stay where she was, and sit through the night, if necessary, waiting for him, for there was no one else to

criticise her actions, or care what she did, except Dick, and Dick would understand.

The sound of a latch-key being slipped into the outer door, and then a brief question and answer in the passage, brought her a vague sense of contentment, and as the voices grew clearer, as master and man ascended the stairs, her body lost its rigid tension, and she leaned back wearily in the chair.

‘A lady waiting for me, do you say? What lady? Did you ask her name?’

‘She did not give me her name, sir. She said you were expecting her.’

‘Expecting? Hm, how stupid of me! I forgot.—Unpardonable of me to forget, Mrs. Henderson. How are you? have you had tea? I thought not. You can bring the lights and some tea in ten minutes time, Smith.’

‘Very good, sir.’

It seemed to both of them an age of silence while they listened to the man’s retreating footsteps, and then came her question :

‘How did you know?’

‘I guessed,’ said Morrison, quietly. ‘I knew you would come to me sooner or later.’

‘Why?’

'Well, you see,' he said, almost apologetically, as he stirred the fire into a blaze, and laid his hand for the moment on her foot, as he knelt upon the hearthrug by her, 'runaway marriages don't always turn out as well as they might, and I thought that if you wanted anything you might perhaps remember, and fall back on our friendship.'

He unlaced the dainty soaked boot as deftly as any lady's maid, and would have taken her long cloak too, had she not clung to it tenaciously.

'It is wet, Olive. It will give you cold.'

'No, no, it is so thick ; it can't hurt me. It is tea I want, tea and . . . you,' she said, hastily, and put out an ungloved hand, as if to hold him.

But he shook his head, with a deprecating smile, and going into the inner room, brought out some slippers.

'I am afraid they will not stay on.' He glanced doubtfully at her stockinged feet. 'But if I hold them to the blaze for a bit, they will be comfortable and warm, and it will be all right as long as you sit still. You musn't catch cold.'

'No,' said Olive, submissively.

It was more like a dream, she thought, than

actual fact, after the desolation of the past three days, to be taken care of by somebody again. How big he looked, big and strong and ugly, just as he had always been in those old days in Wimbledon, when Aunt Lydia and she used to walk two miles to church, and two miles back again twice every Sunday, and Dick had so often met them. She remembered how she used to laugh at his thick, hairy wrists, and the laborious manner in which he generally explained to Aunt Lydia that he was spending the day with a friend in the neighbourhood, and so it really would not be out of his way at all to walk part of it with them.

This harping upon her chance of a chill was so like him, and it would never enter his kind, practical head that she would gladly have risked inflammation of the lungs, nay, even courted death itself, at that particular moment, to have had his arms round her, and to have been told in so many absolute words that he loved her.

The disloyalty of the thought stung her from her apathy, and she almost shrieked at the astonished man who was intent only upon the warming of the slippers.

‘Dick! Don’t do that. I won’t touch them.

I am not fit. I want to tell you what I am, but you must not hate me, Dick.'

'Sh—sh.' Morrison held up a warning finger. 'Smith is just coming up. You are hysterical, Olive, and you must eat and drink something before you talk. You would rather have it in the firelight, eh?'

'Don't make me laugh,' said Olive, irrelevantly; 'for if you make me begin I shall never be able to stop. Tell me about Oaksdene, Dick, and your mother, and Adela. Is she stronger? And do you ever go to the theatre? We have been on the river all the summer, and I have had no time to read the papers. Do tell me about the theatres.'

What he told her sounded to his own ears bald and dull, but she laughed a good deal at it, and even made fun of his clumsiness as tea-maker.

'It reminds me of something I saw once in one of the comic papers.'

Morrison waited patiently.

'Yes, Olive.'

'Have we finished tea?' she asked, feverishly. 'I'm warm, Dick, and I've had my tea, and some toast, too, I think. I forget. Oh yes, I

did, and it was very nice. But mayn't we talk now, or do you think that man is coming in again?'

'He won't come back,' said Morrison, soberly. 'Tell me all about it. Where is your husband?'

'I haven't a husband.'

'Dead? Oh, my poor Olive.'

'I never had one. Do you understand? I thought I had. He took me away, and we were married at St. Margaret's in the city. He gave me the certificate, and told me to put it away safely somewhere, because I might want it one day to show to Aunt Lydia; and when I laughed and said I should never want it, he put it into my desk himself. Look! I took it out on Tuesday.'

She extracted a creased scrap of paper from her purse. *John Henderson and Olive Saltridge*, with the date and other formulæ.

'Well? Well?'

'It looks all right, doesn't it?' said Olive, drearily. 'And it was all right, too, for I know he was fond of me, because he told me so a dozen times a day, and I was very happy. Until Tuesday. Then a letter came from his wife, and by accident I opened it.'

‘His wife? My God!’

The agony in his voice brought the girl's glance from the fire to his face. It was drawn, almost distorted, and for the minute her words were arrested as she sat and gazed at him. She knew Dick loved her, and that he had sworn on that March evening when they two had been alone for so long in the Wimbledon dining-room—the evening that had preceded her flight with Henderson—that if ever she had need of him she would find his affection durable and unchanging; but that he should care so much, honestly amazed her. It also frightened her a little. After all, it was not he, she reflected, who had undergone it all, and it was always easy to be philosophical about other people's troubles. Of the storm of pity which was shaking him she was manifestly unable to take account, since she had never been sorry for any one in the whole stretch of her short life, except, of course, herself.

She looked back at the fire. It was comfortable and commonplace, and left her undivided supremacy of her own emotions.

‘Yes, that's how it was. He had been married before.’

Morrison said something, but so stutteringly that he was incoherent.

'I went nearly mad, I think. He tried to explain. He said I had not sinned, and that if he had, it had been out of love to me, and that his wife was dying, so anyhow it would be all right soon. But I wouldn't listen. How dared he, Dick, how dared he?'

She gripped her hands together with a force that left the knuckles bloodless, and raised her burning eyes to his.

'He had made me his . . . Dick! Dick! don't say the word! Think of something else, Dick. Don't think of me. All the world will know it soon, but don't say it, don't say it;' and she broke into a terrible silent weeping.

'Don't,' said Morrison, feebly; 'don't cry.'

Had Henderson been there he would have strangled him, and gladly faced the inevitable consequences to himself. He was prepared to go any lengths to serve her. But to stay that weeping he knew himself to be powerless.

'But you came to me,' he said at last.

He spoke almost wistfully, as if in extenuation of so patently failing her, and Olive answered with a touch of impatience.

'Where else could I go? I couldn't go to Aunt Lydia. There was no one but you, and you told me to come.'

'Of course. Yes, of course.'

What he wanted to say to her was a renewal of that proposal he had made nine months ago, when having waited until her eighteenth birthday, he had then believed her old enough not to be scared by it. But he did not quite know how to word it. He did not want to appear 'considerate' or 'generous' in any way, for he would much rather that she just took it for granted that he had meant what he said, and was prepared to stick to it. But on the other hand the subject of the marriage must be approached before the necessary plans could be laid.

'It won't make any difference, will it, Dick?' Olive asked suddenly.

She was becoming vaguely alarmed at his continued silence.

Morrison, from his chair at the farther side of the rug, stared back at her blankly. He only wanted, this big-hearted, sparse-worded giant, the right to worship her; and the question hurt. How could it, how could anything, 'make a difference'?

‘I mean the going away with him. You were always so quiet, Dick, I never guessed, and when you did tell me, I had given my promise, and it was all arranged. He always met me after the choir practice, and took me home; and I never saw you except with Aunt Lydia there. You should have told me before I met him. It would have made all the difference.’

She spoke the sober truth, for assuredly she would have married anybody who would have released her from her unloved and unlovely home-life.

Morrison groaned.

‘I know I should. I was an egregious ass; but you were so young that it didn’t seem fair, when you hadn’t seen anybody, and I tried to be patient.’

‘You thought too much about me. He never did; and yet I remember that the evening I loved him best was when he kept me out in the cold for two whole hours,—and Aunt Lydia was, oh, so angry!—because he said I had bewitched him too much for him to let me go.’

A faint scorn had crept into her tone, but probably she herself did not know whether it

was called there by the man who had mastered her, or the man who had not.

'But I hate him now, Dick; I hate him now,—don't look like that when I talk about him,—and when I left him on Tuesday and came to London, I should have killed myself that night if you hadn't been in town. I can't face Aunt Lydia, and there would be nothing else to do.'

Her voice was ordinarily low and intense, but it was now so completely a whisper that Morrison unconsciously drew nearer to her to hear.

'How did you know I was in town?'

'I saw your shadow on the blind.'

'But this is Friday.'

'I know. I tried to come before, but I was afraid. I thought I might come into the room, and find him here.'

'You forget,—I have never seen Henderson; and anyhow this is the last place on earth to which he would come.' Morrison's hands were holding hers, and they tightened involuntarily. 'He would not dare, Olive.'

'No, it was stupid of me; but I had thought so many dreadful things that they grew all to seem possible, and it frightened me.'

She leaned her head upon his shoulder, and sighed contentedly like a tired child.

'Now I shan't think any more, unless you want me to, Dick? But Henderson isn't his real name, you know.'

'I don't want to hear anything about it,' Morrison declared hastily. 'It would be safer that I didn't know.'

'Really and truly, Dick? Are you sure?'

'Really and truly, dear.'

His cheek was resting against her hair, and turning his head he kissed her gravely.

'We have nothing more to do with the past, nor with anything concerning it. You belong to me now, you know that, don't you?'

'Yes, Dick.'

'Now let me think. You don't want to go anywhere near your aunt, do you? No; that is quite settled. And you haven't any other relations? Well, then, how do you think it would be to go and stay with some old servants of ours who married, and keep lodgings in Jermyn Street? Emma would make you very comfortable, and she is a splendid cook.'

'And you?'

She raised her head, and leaned back in her

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chair away from him, watching him with frightened eyes.

‘I? Oh, I must go down to Oaksdene, and stay there for two or three weeks.’

‘For two or three—*weeks*?’

Morrison rose to his feet, and planting himself with his back to the fireplace, stood looking down at her with an oddly complacent smile.

‘It sounds so queer to hear you care twopence if I am away three weeks or three years,’ he said simply. ‘But I don’t think I need be quite so long as that if you are afraid of being left. I must try if I can make a fortnight do; but you see there will be a tremendous lot to arrange about, and I don’t want to spring it too abruptly on the mother and Adela.’

‘Two or three—weeks!’

‘Why yes,’ said Morrison. ‘They have been awfully good to me all my life, you know; and though they won’t mind a bit, not one little bit, Olive, so long as I am happy, still I suppose it is rather hard lines on them that I haven’t fallen in love with some girl whom they know, and whose wedding they could fuss about, and so on.’

‘But you could get it done quicker than that.’

‘Hardly. There is Christmas, you see, in another ten days, and my mother would break her heart if I didn’t spend it with them. And then there is always a big dinner to be given to the tenants, and a treat of some kind to the school children. It is a horrid nuisance coming just now, but I can’t wound my mother, or spoil all the people’s fun, for the sake of grasping at my own happiness a few days the sooner. You would not wish it, Olive.’

She did not reply, but tears rose and brimmed her eyes, and Morrison felt he was behaving like a brute.

‘You really will be all right with Emma, and I’ll steal a day in the middle, and run up to see you. And then if you don’t care about going out much without me, you can send out orders to the shops, and have in a lot of pretty things to choose from. You will want gowns, and all sorts of things. You’d like that, wouldn’t you, Olive? See how far you can go towards ruining me before I get back again.’

There was no answering smile on her face.

‘You will marry me first, Dick? You must marry me first.’

‘And take you with me to Oaksdene?’

‘No. No. Of course not. You don’t know what you are saying. Marry me, and leave me here—anywhere, while you go away.’

In her excitement she rose and clutched his arm, and Morrison began patting her hand with a clumsy attempt at soothing, that made her bite her lip. She was struggling bravely for self-control.

‘Marry me at once, Dick, dearest, dearest Dick.’

‘My poor child! Come, be reasonable. If I did that, it would not only hurt my mother unutterably, but it would also mean injuring you. I’m well off, I’m my own master, both she and Adela are anxious I should settle down. Why for heaven’s sake, everybody will ask, does he make a secret of the affair? You see that would never do. Now my plan is to go down and prepare her mind, and play squire in the usual way, announcing to our good neighbours the fact of my speedily approaching marriage. I shall tell her about your father’s living near Liverpool, and how we came to know each other, and that we are intending to marry quietly in London without any feathers or fuss, because you have broken with your only relation, through no fault of your own, and I

don't choose to subject you to the idiotic wonderings of my own friends as to why you are not married from her house. Then when it is all over, we'll go down to Oaksdene and give some swell teas and dinners in all your new finery, and the world and his wife will be as satisfied as you and I and the dear old mother will be.'

Morrison was slow-witted, and he mapped out this plan with much deliberation, and more than one lengthy pause ; but once at its finish his face visibly brightened, so sure was he of her approval.

'There! That will do excellently,' he exclaimed, 'and every word of it is gospel truth.'

She dropped her cheek upon his outstretched hand, and he felt it flaming in the darkness ; she crouched lower and lower. She would have fallen had he not caught and raised her.

'Olive!'

'Can't you—won't you understand?' she said desperately. 'Can't you—guess?' and she recoiled from him a couple of paces.

Morrison fumbled for matches, and mechanically lit the lamp, glancing at her over his

shoulder as he did so. Something throbbed in his throat.

She had unbuttoned her loose, heavy cloak, and it slid slowly from her shoulders to her feet. Morrison gazed at her, the match burning steadily the while until it scorched his fingers. Then—

‘Don’t,’ he said hoarsely.

He picked up the cloak in haste, and wrapped it round her. His face was a dull red, and his hands shook, as very gently he put her back into the chair.

‘We will marry at once,’ he whispered.

CHAPTER II

Dick Morrison went down to Oaksdene a married man. A marriage is not a difficult thing to arrange, nor is it a lengthy business when there is a long purse to back it, and the third day to that on which Olive came to him, they were made man and wife. He took a couple of pleasant rooms for her other than with the vaunted Emma in Jermyn Street, and engaged a middle-aged woman as maid, to whose comely, sensible face Olive took an immediate fancy. He then proceeded to dismiss his own man with a month's wages, for a dim recollection of addressing Olive in his presence as 'Mrs. Henderson' precluded all possibility of taking Smith with him to Oaksdene, and put his Pall Mall rooms into the hands of a house-agent.

'We'll go abroad pretty soon, and get you strong again,' he said to Olive, with a show of much cheerfulness; 'and, meanwhile, I'll ware-

house my things, so they won't be in the way, until we decide later what we are going to do. You would like best to leave plans vague for a bit, wouldn't you?'

That one idea of arranging everything as she liked possessed him during the few days he still remained in town, and as Olive's gratitude had risen to fever point, they were exceedingly content with each other.

'Don't think of your mother, for it makes you look worried, and I hate those upright lines between your eyes,' she said, coaxingly, to him once. 'Don't think of anybody but me. You are giving me all your actions, Dick, and I could kneel down and worship you for your goodness; but I want your thoughts to be all for myself too, your thoughts and your words. I should like you to tell me you love me all the day long, and then, for fear I should forget, whisper it again in the evening.'

To which speech Dick returned one of his silent, deprecating smiles, feeling uncomfortable the while at the extravagance of her diction, and regretting it less from a sense of its foolishness—for what was the use of repeating what they both knew so well?—than because he

considered it as a sign of being overwrought. She never used to talk in that kind of strain in the old days, and he looked forward to her return to every-day and commonplace as a proof of recovery from the evil nervous effect of the past year.

Then fearing he had not sheltered her enough even from himself, he went out and bought her a piece of jewellery, which cost him considerably more than a caress would have done, and which undoubtedly pleased her less, though in these first days, when she was so laboriously nursing the gratitude she mistook for something more, she did not allow herself to question his doings.

On the evening before his departure, she herself, since Morrison had obediently striven to banish the subject from his mind, and it had not again been mentioned between them, began talking, inconsistently enough, about his home belongings.

'Are you worrying much over what you are going to tell them, Dick?'

He shook his head.

'You asked me not to think of it, and as a matter of fact I have been too full of you to have had much time.'

She looked at him curiously.

'I should promise, too, if you asked me anything ; but I should go on thinking to myself all the same. I could not help it. I believe you say that to satisfy me.'

'Satisfy you?'

'Yes ; you don't want me to be sad too, and so you answer what I want to hear.'

'But I would never do that,' said Morrison, much amazed. 'Don't you see that all our future happiness depends on our being completely open with each other? If you didn't ask me for all you want, I should be constantly bothering myself for fear there was a wish going ungratified ; and if you didn't cry,' Morrison's theories were of the primitive order, and he had an idea that no woman suffered without crying, 'I shouldn't know when you were unhappy.'

Olive laughed. If there were one thing her husband would have had altered in her, it was that her laughter should have come at less inappropriate moments.

'I understand,' she said, presently. 'Now, what about you?'

'Me? Just the same thing. If I am glad about the inspector's report of our schools or

annoyed about my inability to content Adela, I think in duty bound that I ought to tell you of it. It is by having separate interests that people grow apart, and we mustn't do that, eh, Olive?'

The girl smothered a yawn. She could not conceive herself caring in the least about such dull things as inspectors' reports, though she thought it a pity that Dick should waste as much money on the schools as he seemed inclined to do, but curiosity as to his sister prompted her to reply :

'Of course I agree with you, and, oh ! do tell me what you mean about Adela.'

'Well, it's hard to explain until you know her, but she is nearly ten years older than I am, and she's a deal clearer-sighted, and . . . Well, she knows it. That's all.'

'And says so. Horrid thing !' supplemented Olive. 'You mean she interferes, don't you, Dick? I know the sort of woman exactly, a kind of Aunt Lydia. I should hate her.'

'Oh no, you wouldn't,' said Morrison, placidly. 'Take her all round, Adela is a good soul, even if she does interfere, and I don't think she can help it. I don't recollect my father, but so far

as I can make out, he was just such another, hard-headed, but still with his bark a good deal worse than his bite. Probably Adela takes after him. I believe a good deal in inheritance, and that sort of thing.'

'Do you, Dick? Really, really, Dick?'

He had been looking out of the window while they chatted, but turned round hastily at the sharp pain in her voice.

'Not always, not invariably, I didn't mean *that*,' he said, awkwardly. 'I often talk like an unmitigated ass, Olive,—you ask Adela,—and you mustn't pay much attention to what I say.'

But that she had, and that his words had brought back her old terror he learned in the night, when he was awakened by a pitiful sobbing, and the broken words, 'O God! let baby be like me. Do let baby be like me.'

The next day Morrison left town, and though he was not the sort of man to be ordinarily affected by weather, he could not but feel that the steady downpour of rain which attended his journey was due to a certain fitness of things.

'It is a thoroughly beastly day, and I'm in a

thoroughly beastly frame of mind,' he told himself savagely, and when he arrived at the little country station and found that his mother had sent both the dog-cart and the brougham to meet him, her kindness seemed an unnecessary aggravation of what he was already bearing.

'The mistress, she thought it better to send both, sir, seeing as you prefer the cart most times, but to-day the rain it do be awful,' explained the small groom, with a broad grin of welcome. 'All alone, sir?'

'Can't you see I am?' returned his master, ill-humouredly. 'Do you think I've got Smith in my pocket, you little fool?'

It was the natural swing of the pendulum, and, having behaved like a modern Quixote, he was now in an abominably bad temper at having to face the immediate consequences.

The surprised look on the boy's rosy face brought him a twinge of shame, and adding a hasty 'Never mind, Harry, I'm very glad to see you. Are all well at home?' he climbed to his seat without waiting for an answer.

'I do believe it would be a satisfaction to me to kick that poor little chap over the hedge,' ran his thoughts as he swung along the heavy roads.

And I never even thought of telegraphing to Olive. What a beast I am!

His mother met him in the hall.

Is it not Fontenelle who says that when old age is the embodiment of all that is good, gentle and tender, it is an infallible sign that at one time the worn body has been the shrine of love?

It held true, at all events, with Mrs. Morrison, for many years of a rigorous self-suppression, and a patient deference to the wishes of her 'practical and hard-headed' husband and daughter had left her at seventy with a freshness and a dignity of beauty which surpassed that of many a far younger woman. Her eyes, which in their honesty and blueness were like her son's, might be sunken, but they had responded too often to the dumb friendliness of every child's who approached her ever to have had time to lose their own laughter; while wrinkles could not spoil the outlines of a mouth which owed its perfection to the serenity of its speech. If, in her peacefully narrowed existence, there had been room for wonderment, it might have found vent as to what she had ever done to merit so dear a son as Dick; but more probably

she took her blessings as she took her griefs, with the unquestioning faith of a little child. The one difference which she permitted herself, outwardly, to make between her children, was that in talking to them she brought in Dick's name oftener than Adela's. She liked the sound better.

‘My dear boy!’

‘Why, mother?’

Hanging on to each other they turned from the hall into a little oak-paneled room, half library, half boudoir, where Mrs. Morrison spent most of her time.

‘I thought you were never coming, Dick. Don't you know, you bad boy, that we are all at a standstill until we know your wishes? And to-day is the twenty-first.’ She devoured him with her eyes. ‘Dick, you are not looking well.’

‘Then I am a gigantic fraud,’ returned Morrison lightly, ‘for I never was fitter. How are Vixen and Vi? I mean, how is Adela? Ah! here are the dogs. Well, my beauties.’

The frantic demonstrations of delight on the part of the fox-terriers helped him through the next ten minutes, while he was put rapidly into touch with the home doings, and then his

sister came in, and the dogs instantly grew more decorous, and squatted soberly at his feet.

She was a tall striking-looking woman, and her brother thought sometimes that they would have had more in common if she had considered him occasionally as an individual, and not so exclusively as the representative of a fine old race whose business it was to uphold its traditions, and to add to its glory. Her permanent grievance was that he had refused an invitation to stand at the last election; her strongest desire, that he should make an ambitious marriage, and that speedily.

'Did you think you would add to your welcome by driving it so late, Dick?' was her opening remark. 'You have no idea of the inconvenience you have put us to, but I suppose that does not matter.'

'I'm awfully sorry,' Morrison said, shortly. He had a vivid remembrance of Olive's imploring request that he would not leave her, and of the wrench it had been to get away. 'I fancied things must be pretty well in train, for I've written to Green nearly every day, and he is generally very reliable. I have ordered down a

conjuror for the school entertainment on Christmas Eve.'

'On Christmas Eve? You mean New Year's Eve. We never have it till then.'

'Perhaps Dick has to leave us earlier this year, and can't give us so long a time as usual,' Mrs. Morrison put it mildly. 'I thought Green and I were calculating for different dates, and if he has arranged for it, it really does not matter at all, so long as the poor little things have enough to eat. Is that it, my boy? Other engagements?'

Her son nodded.

'I will tell you all about it presently, mother, but we won't begin talking of going away the minute I have come. If we are behind hand, as Adela says, we must buckle to and get forward now I am here at last. I'm terribly vexed, mother, if I have put you out in any way.'

Mrs. Morrison's laugh seemed to clear the atmosphere.

'Don't talk in our benighted country way Dick, as if our modest little festivities required superhuman effort,' she said, pleasantly. 'Your wonderful Green is a host in himself, and if you are short of hands for decorating the rooms,'

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she glanced at her own jewelled fingers, and blew him from them the daintiest of kisses, 'why, I can fasten up mistletoe with the best of them.'

Morrison proved as good as his word. He delayed all explanations as to his shortened visit, and 'buckled-to' with such energy that every man, woman, and child on the estate had good reason to wish that the old adage of Christmas coming but once a year had not held good in their particular case. He managed to run up once to town for a few hours, and while there spent most of his time in fastening a rubber protection on to the window of Olive's bedroom, from which he said there was a draught.

'Can't you send in a man to do it, and talk to me now?' Olive asked, impatiently.

She found it but poor fun to sit there watching him, while the maid held the contrivance straight, and supplied him with hammer and nails.

'No use; they wouldn't come,' he answered, intent upon his measurements. 'You have no idea of the difficulty of getting work-people at this time of the year. Don't take away your hand, Mary. Now then, another nail, please.'

Olive sighed. For the second time the recol-

lection came to her of the utter disregard her other lover had shown to all this sort of—her lips pursed contemptuously,—this sort of humdrum and service-wise affection, and of those stolen delicious interviews of the past year. Of course, there was no comparing the infamous way in which Bernard had treated her, with Dick's, she meant dear Dick's, nobility and care ; but still at the same time she recollected.

‘I told Adela that I shouldn't be at Oakdene for the New Year, but I find she has arranged a big dinner for the first all the same, so I think I'll stay over it, if you don't mind, and come up for good on the second,’ Morrison said to her when the cab had been summoned. ‘You see I can't possibly write to you, worse luck ; for even if I ride over, and post my letter in Luton, an envelope addressed to Mrs. Richard Morrison would very likely attract attention. But if you want me especially, you can telegraph right enough.’

‘Then you are going to tell your mother on the second ? And Adela.’ Olive's eyes sparkled mischievously. ‘Oh, Dick, I would give anything to see Adela's face when all her cherished castles in the air come tumbling down

about her ears. Who has she pitched on, Dick, amongst the neighbours? You have never told me. Is there a Lady Jane, or is she willing to put up with a mere honourable? Oh, I'd love to see her face.'

The fancy amused her so much that she bid him goodbye in the best possible spirits, and Morrison admitted frankly that since it struck her in that light it was a pity they could not change places.

'It is not such pleasant work thwarting Adela as you seem to imagine,' he added; 'while as for the dear old mother . . .'

'There are those lines between your eyes again,' Olive cried, jealously. 'You . . . you don't regret it, Dick?'

'The happiness of my life? It is so likely, isn't it?' returned Morrison with one of his rare smiles.

He kissed her, and so they parted.

The big dinner passed off in the usual fashion of such entertainments at Oaksdene, which were of the immaculate but heavy order. They satisfied the guests who approved Mrs Morrison's cook, and knew that Adela's supervision would give them hints for the ordering of their own

tables in the latest London groupings of silver and flowers; and they were found an unmitigated bore by the host and hostess who were usually brought to the endeavour, as in the present instance, by finding that the invitations had been issued without their knowledge. Morrison had no small talk at his command, and did not dare touch upon the field and land topics which really interested him so long as the ladies were present; while his mother, who had spent all her younger life in Paris, had never quite lived down her kindly contempt for home-keeping wits.

With the departure of the last guest they both heaved genuine sighs of relief, glancing round guiltily to see if Adela were within hearing.

'The whole affair reflects the greatest credit on her, and of course it is pleasant to see one's friends,' Morrison added, penitently, 'but it is my last evening, and I've seen nothing of you.'

'Come up to my room and see me there.'

'What! You don't mean to say you still keep up your bad habits? Mother, I'm ashamed of you.'

The old lady laughed.

'My dear Dick, what would you? Prayers at

a quarter to ten every night of our lives, and then to bed. Why, just imagine how stupid I should be if I spent all that time asleep. No, no. I go upstairs out of deference to Adela, who says we have no business to keep the servants up later, and then I dismiss Hawkins, and get to my dear books. Sometimes they are the learned articles you have marked for me, Dick—my dear boy, doesn't your head ever ache over those rows of statistics?—but oftener it is—French novels! Adela told me the other day that we got through an extraordinary amount of candles, but we could neither of us account for it.'

Morrison's laugh ended in a second sigh.

'I wish I were as young as you, mother,' he said enviously. 'Good-night for the present. I'll see the place is locked up, and then I'll come.'

His opening words were to air a grievance.

'I do wish Adela would behave differently. It is all very well to say she means it kindly, and I'm sure I tell myself so a dozen times a day, but I wish she would either contrive to hold her tongue, or to be willing that I should hold mine.'

Mrs. Morrison's manner was sympathetic, but strictly non-committal.

‘What is it now, Dick?’

‘What is it ever, mother? You must have seen how she flung me at Lady Mary's head to-night. She put her on my left, although that certainly wasn't her place; she turned young Druce off the music-stool and made me play the girl's accompaniments, though he would have done it ever so much better; and when she and her father were going, Adela made some ridiculous pretext to leave us in the hall together for a minute. She will think I am a perfect idiot.’

‘I don't think she will do that.’

‘And the worst of it is that with Adela one knows it is never lack of tact. It is always malice of forethought when she is so aggravating.’

‘You are going to-morrow,’ said his mother soothingly, ‘and you won't have to meet Lady Mary or Lady Anybody Else for a long time unless you choose. But you mustn't be too hard upon poor Adela, for you must marry some time or other, and it is only natural she should be interested in it. You are nearly thirty, you see, Dick.’

Morrison brought his irritable pacing to an end, and taking a low chair which stood near his mother's couch, seated himself astride it, his arms crossed upon the back.

'Do you want me to marry?'

'If you can win the love of a good girl, yes. You know I do.'

There was a short silence while Morrison's fingers thrummed the chair impatiently.

The old lady broke it by asking gently: 'Shall I help you out with it, Dick?' And as he turned his startled face to her, she added, 'Did you think I did not know you had something to tell me? Dick, I knew it before my arms met round your neck on your arrival, and I have been so distressed because for the first time in his life my boy has found a difficulty in telling me.'

'Mother, it is because I am so afraid of hurting you. I . . .'

'Who is she, Dick?'

'Olive Saltridge. Her father—he is dead—was vicar of a little place called Saley, some miles north of Liverpool.'

'Yes, yes, but tell me about her. I don't want a catalogue of facts. I want to hear she

is the very dearest girl in all the world, or out of it. That she is so pretty that a whole week's explanations could not make me understand how very, very pretty she is. That you are the luckiest lover who ever breathed. Dick, Dick, do you think I am too old for your litany of love?'

She paused breathless, with the tears in her eyes, and stretched her hands towards him.

'Come closer to me, my son.'

Morrison did not move. His sense of honesty forbade him, until she knew all the little he could tell her; but his grimly set mouth reminded her of his dead father's, and of an unwritten chapter in her own life, and she trembled.

'She is not of our set,' Morrison said presently; 'at least not exactly. She is a lady, of course, through and through, for I'm not that sort of man, and it is hard to explain what I mean.' Evidently he was at some pains to choose his words. 'She is not like Lady Mary, you know, or any of the girls Adela is always cramming down my throat. She has no house, or belongings, and . . . and one doesn't meet her about everywhere. You understand the sort of girl, don't you?'

'Is she a governess? Do you mean that, dear? I don't think I ever quite imagined you would fall in love with a mere butterfly, Dick.'

'That's more it. I don't suppose you have come across any one like her, for most of the people one knows are either like oneself, or else they touch their hats, and call you "sir." Olive and her aunt lived in a pokey little house in Wimbledon, and I came to know her through a wet day and the loan of my umbrella, when I happened to have gone down there golfing with Talbot. Miss Saltridge was a governess when she was younger, and when she dies I suppose Olive would have had to turn out and do the same.'

'It is a romance, Dick. Fancy my serious and steady son owing his future wife to a borrowed umbrella! Tell me how old she is. And where is her photograph?'

'Nineteen. This doesn't in the least do her justice, mother.' He took a carte from his pocket-book, and tossed it over without moving. 'Her face is colourless, except for her lips, and they are of that wonderful dark red of those geraniums in the bed at the bottom of the garden. And her hair is very dark, and loose, and untidy, but somehow it is an untidiness that

one doesn't seem to mind. And then her eyes, instead of being dark too, are quite light, but they have the biggest pupils I ever saw. They make her look quite uncanny sometimes, when she is excited.'

'And you love her, Dick?'

'Yes,' was all he answered; but it may be doubted whether lengthier protestations would have conveyed so much.

'When is she coming to stay here?'

'Here?'

'Why, of course. I am longing to know her, poor child, and she will feel less isolated when she has seen Oaksdene, and come to know us.—Go on, Dick. There is something else. Tell me what it is.'

Morrison jerked up his head, which had fallen on to his arms.

'I have married her, mother, and she can't come here because she is in town, daily expecting the child.'

In the silence that followed, his head dropped back to its former position. He was in for it now, and he would have to lie well if his lies were to gain credence. In his way, he had to the full as much family pride as his sister,

although it took a different outlet, and it galled him inexpressibly, this necessity of stooping to deceit.

'Dick,' said his mother, softly.

She had come behind him, and had slid her two hands between his cheeks and the rough coat sleeve.

'I didn't want any feathers or fuss,' he responded dully, trying hard to recall the best sequence of what he had intended to say. 'By marrying her quietly, I spared Olive all the chitter-chatter and surprise of people who won't mind their own business, and who can't conceive of a wedding which is not announced beforehand in the *Morning Post*.'

'So you did not tell even me.'

There was no farther reproach, but he could feel the hot tears which dropped upon his bowed head.

'I couldn't, mother. I felt I had behaved badly to you in trying to behave well to her, and . . . and so I have. You will tell Adela about it when I am gone, won't you? for there is nothing to be gained by a row with her.'

'She will want to know the date, Dick, and where it was.'

‘I know.’ He had foreseen this. ‘It will have to be explained to her. The first time was last winter, and there was a hitch about it. Don’t ask me how, dear; it was a very painful and miserable business, and I am not going to recall it. The only thing that matters is that you should understand that neither she nor I were in the least to blame. We had not the faintest idea but that it was all right. When we found it wasn’t, we married again on the 18th of December, before breakfast one morning, at St. James’s, in Picadilly, and that is the date Adela would find at Somerset House if she took the trouble to look it up.’

Mrs. Morrison felt vaguely uneasy. The explanation contented her, for in part she felt she sympathised with Dick’s conduct, and what seemed lacking as regards adequacy of motive was doubtless to be ascribed to Olive’s influence. If she were not his equal in social position, nothing of course was likelier than that she should shrink from risking a welcome from her husband’s relations, and should prefer to keep him to herself.

But what contented her was, she knew, quite a different thing to what would content her

daughter, and she foresaw several stormy interviews when she was told of what had happened. One thing to be thankful for was that, for all their sakes, Adela would hide up this dreadful and unexplained mistake about the legality of the first marriage, and would put a smooth face upon it for the benefit of the neighbours.

She lifted the head which was still pressing dejectedly upon her hands, and cradled it against her shoulder.

‘My poor, poor boy! But your troubles are at an end now, Dick. I must wait here for a day or two, until it is arranged with Adela, and then I will follow you to town. She will be nervous and frightened until she is assured I am . . . I am quite pleased about it all, and anyhow the poor child will want a woman near her. Why, Dick’—her lips brushed his forehead—‘it will give me back my youth to have a baby in my arms again. We must pray it may be a boy, dear. The birth of an heir will go far towards reconciling Adela, and we will have such bonfires and festivities, that the whole county will know how proud we are of him. I wish he could be born at Oaksdene, but I suppose that is impossible now.’

Her bowed head was too near her son's head for her to see the expression which suddenly flashed into his eyes, but she felt the violent upward jerk of his whole body, and she relaxed her hold in amazement. The next moment Morrison sprang to his feet. It was one of the few times in his life when he lost his self-control. His face had darkened, the vein between his eyes swelled ominously, and his clenched fist struck at the empty air before falling stiffly to his side.

'Damn him !' he said thickly, and would have made headlong for the door had not Mrs. Morrison flung herself in his path.

She, poor woman, thought him suddenly bereft of his senses, and dreaded to have him leave her.

'Dick, Dick ! don't ! Your little baby, your poor little baby,' she cried, clinging to him with all her weak force.

He stopped instantly.

'Do you think I cursed him ? I would not do that. I was thinking of someone else,' he said slowly. 'I have been overtired lately. I am overdone. Forgive me, mother.'

It was with his old gentleness that he loosened her clasp, but he went away without glancing to

the right or left, and presently she heard the house door unfastened, and then closed behind him. He had gone out into the grounds.

The gardener complained bitterly next day of the wanton destruction of his flower-beds by some person or persons unknown ; for it looked to him, he said, as if some madman had gone stamping up and down the lawn without the slightest heed to what lay in his path. Yet had his master, who had started for London by the early train, been there to receive the complaint, it is doubtful whether he would have recognised himself as the delinquent, for Jeffrey's phrase had hit the mark, and if ever a man were beside himself with mingled rage, mortification, and regret, Morrison was that night.

It was odd that it should have been so when he was such an intensely practical man, but until the moment when his mother had foretold the advent of the heir, the sex of the unborn child had never crossed his mind. He had been abruptly flung from his ordinary balance, and had been so full of Olive, and of the various pressing necessities which Olive's advent had engendered, that his mind had held room for nothing else. He had thought of it simply in that fashion,—

"it"—as a thing that would wail, and wear white clothes, and belong exclusively to Olive, and for which he pitied her, poor darling, from the bottom of his heart, since it would be a perpetual reminder of a time, the remembrance of which she might otherwise have outlived. But the heir, his heir, Olive's son, and consequently his; the child for whom a bonfire would be lighted, like the one which had been piled high at his own birth years before, and for whom the bells from the little village church would ring a peal of welcome, as they had rung in times past for him. This was something different and horrible. This was reality.

It was a fine frosty night, and the moonlight flooded the garden. The man, whose rapidly passing shadow danced so fantastically over the smooth shaven grass, came suddenly to a standstill, and for the first time took note of his surroundings. Yonder was the rose-walk, where his ambitious baby footsteps had tripped, and so led him into an abrupt embrace of Mother-Earth. He remembered,—it was the first event of which he had any recollection at all,—how an old woman, who was probably his nurse, had coaxed him not to cry; and how, when he

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had gallantly responded to her appeal, she had proudly pronounced him to be every bit 'a chip of the old block.' Would another child, with alien blood in his veins, have just such speeches made him? Here was the lawn where, much the same height as the old bat belonging to his father with which he had insisted on playing, he had been initiated into the mysteries of single wicket; and under this yew he had been wont to stand on his birthdays to receive the tenants' congratulations to the little squire. Would the boy care for cricket, and demand his rights, too? And the old tree His rights! Good Lord! *his* rights.

Crossing the home paddock at the top of his speed, he struck into the little wood which skirted it, and flung himself down on the ground. Ah! This was fitter; the moonbeams were shut out here; here all was dark, and he was free to drop the hampering manhood, to sob out his unavailing grief, and to rail against the man who had done him such a deadly wrong, with no sterner witness than the moss-grown earth where he had played in boyhood, and where in youth he had dreamed his brightest dreams. This sympathy with the actual earth, this deep-rooted love of

the land where he had been born and bred, was part of his inheritance, and every year had intensified it. Oaksdene was but a little place, but it had been passed on from father to son for ten unbroken generations; and when its present owner had been goaded by home taunts into self-defence, he had every right to protest that if he had done nothing as yet to make his name prominent, at all events he had shown himself possessed of the negative virtue of keeping it stainless. That was an empty boast now.

He dug his outflung hands into the stiffened moss.

'You are mine, you are mine,' he cried fiercely, his fingers bleeding with the energy of his clutch, and his wild eyes uplifted to the swaying pine-branches overhead.

He felt so strong, so passionately 'earth of the earth earthy' in its most literal sense, which refuses to be detached from things tangible, that it seemed impossible that he could ever be called upon to die, and leave this unborn child to reign in his stead. Yet, as he uttered the words, he knew them to be powerless. He must live his life and go down to the grave as his fathers had gone before him; and even, as the years rolled

on, if a boy of his own were sent him, with innocent accusing eyes, this interloper, this nameless son of another man, would still remain to rob the lad of his birthright. The secret would be hedged with perpetual silence, but if he shrieked his shame to the four winds of heaven it would remain unaltered. By his own act and decree he had willed it, and nothing could annul.

It was characteristic of his notions of what was just, that it never once occurred to him to regret his marriage, or to think hardly of Olive. She had acted throughout exactly as he would have expected any girl of her temperament, under similar conditions, to act, and to connect any idea of blame with her would have been ridiculous as well as cruel. If blame could attach to either of them it was to him for the blind stupidity which had prevented him from having, as she put it, 'told' her, when the telling 'would have made all the difference.' The fatal consequences seemed disproportionately heavy for a mistake which, after all, was one of chivalry; but at school, he recollected, punishment always fell more on the fools than the scamps of the class, and so he vaguely supposed it was fair

enough somehow, although he could not quite see how.

His passion, which had been wearing itself out in this sullen brooding, flamed up again, and Olive's piteous prayer that the baby might resemble her, and which, with his mind filled with fears for her own safety, he had heeded but little at the time, echoed anew in his ears. If the child were not like her, whom would it be like? Talbot? Talbot was his best friend, on whose honour and cleanliness of life he would have staked his own, but Talbot lived at Wimbledon, and . . . Faugh! He must be going mad. He loathed himself for the hideous thought. Why, honest old Talbot, he knew him through and through—had known him since they were little fellows together in the lower school; it was out of all course of probability that old Talbot could be leading a double life and he not know it. But Talbot would have said the same thing of him, and yet here he was a married man and his friend had no inkling of it.

Was it Doyle, that man at the club for whom he had always felt such a strong aversion? He had heard that Doyle had spent the summer at

Staines or some other place on the river ; and though he had paid no attention at the time to a subject which did not interest him, he seemed now to remember that the laugh with which the information had been volunteered had suggested ulterior motive. Was it Greaves? Was it Ponsonby?

He tried to drive his thoughts in another direction by endeavouring to determine how many of the people he knew who had seen her by chance during the preceding summer would recognise her when it came to introductions. Her personality was too striking to be overlooked, and in a boat, in her white gown, and with the gaudy cushions of which she was so fond, no one would pass her without turning to look again. In a cursory glance did a woman's wedding ring strike one or not? He had never noticed. Or would the very pose of the man . . .

Was it Somerville? . . . Or Ashton? He ran through the list of the men he knew, feverishly, shrinkingly, as name after name presented itself, and then the devil's whisper came louder. Was it, could it be—Talbot?

The shiver which shook him from head to foot relaxed his grip on the ground, and involun-

tarily he drew in his arms. They came so stiffly, being cramped both by attitude and cold, that the physical pain brought him forcibly back to a sense of the present. With some difficulty he got on to his feet, and limped slowly homewards. He felt crushed and beaten as a man must after a struggle with the inevitable, and quieted by reason of his utter exhaustion. The skies had clouded, and no moonlight illumined his footsteps as he stumbled over the iron fence of the paddock, and with down-bent head went doggedly on towards the garden. But as he crossed the lawn he glanced up. Hours ago the house should have been shrouded in the same impenetrable darkness as that which surrounded him, but from one window still shone a faint light.

At the sight, his face lost a little of its hard drawn tension, for he knew it burned to-night for a reason other than books. It was his mother's candle. She, too, had kept vigil.

CHAPTER III

“*Je m’ennuie—un peu—beaucoup—énormement. Je m’ennuie—un peu.*” Ah! you ought to have run to two more if you meant to be truthful.’

Thus Olive to the points of a big leaf which she had selected hap-hazard from the bunch which was lying in her lap, and too idle to count another, she clasped her hands behind her head and leaned back upon them lazily, thinking.

How intensely she was bored! She had endured fifteen months of this kind of life now, this wandering from one continental city to another, and she could not recollect which of them all she had found the most unsatisfactory. Cannes had been their first resting-place after her child’s birth, and it was at Cannes that she had learned to grow weary of Dick’s over-scrupulous care, and the little army of doctors and nurses with which he had surrounded her. This Como, with its lake and its cathedral, and

its excursions, of all of which she was most unfeignedly tired, was the last. And between them stretched a wearisome number of places, the very names of which she could only recall by associating them with the particular fad of Dick's which had been rampant there. If only he had been different, or if only he had been less blundering in his attempts at amusing her, she would have enjoyed herself well enough; but as it was . . .

Now Zurich, for instance. Zurich boasted some very good shops, where the hours might have been passed pleasantly enough; but what was the use of wasting whole mornings in the museum, working up the subject of the lake-dwellers? It was bad enough to be bored by people who were alive, but to be bored by the dead was intolerable. And then when at last it had entered his kind dense brain that she cared nothing for these things, he was always planning expeditions to see wonderful views, which, of the two, was rather worse. What was the use of going to the top of the Righi, and staying there three days to see a good sunrise, or busying oneself in the legends of the canton? She would much rather have been

on the Lucerne lake in one of those gaily curtained little boats, being told pretty stories about herself. Only Dick never did say pretty things; that was the worst of it. It was Bernard who did that, just as it was Bernard who would have taken her to the casino and concert-rooms which Dick condemned as unhealthy, and who would have lounged for hours in a park in a state of blissful content; whereas Dick sat through the allotted time striving hard to comment intelligibly on the passers-by, and covertly consulting his watch.

'If he had only looked at it openly, I shouldn't have minded so much,' she said to herself, angrily, and tossed the unoffending leaves to the floor; 'but he is always so desperately anxious to spare me, and not hurt my feelings, and he always—yes, always—does it in exactly the wrong way.'

The boy, too, had been another difficulty, though Dick's dreams of a tiny daughter had gone unrealised, and Georgie still held undisputed sovereignty. Olive was undoubtedly fond of him in her way, but it was a way which required to be supported by power to rid herself of him whenever he whimpered or

grew troublesome. He was a fine handsome little fellow, and her fondness for him ran through the whole gamut of love-names, and evinced itself in wonderfully befrilled and laced frocks, sufficient to clothe a whole crèche of babies. But Morrison was so foolish as to imagine that his ideal of motherhood must of necessity be hers also, and so this did not satisfy him. He had been horribly afraid from the first of being jealous of her affection for the child; and so if ever their supposed interests clashed, he hastened to sacrifice himself without the remotest conception that he was also sacrificing her.

'I told them we shouldn't want the carriage this evening. You won't care to go out, now Georgie has a cold,' was the kind of remark to which she was often treated, and lacking the courage to confess honestly she did not much care, Olive would spend the evening in a heated room, equally bewailing her lost moonlit drive, and the crass stupidity of her husband.

Her head whirled sometimes with that endless comparing of two men which she found so inevitable. Now if Bernard had been there, and the evening balmy, and the moonlight white

and beautiful, how long would it have taken him to convince her that, come what might, the only possible thing to do was to go out and enjoy it?

‘Sweeting!’

How silly a word it would sound to Dick; but the memory of it even now, as she recalled the tender cadences of the voice that spoke it, had power to move her. She smiled, and leaned forward. Yes, that was what he would say.

‘Sweeting, we agreed to be first with each other, you know, and all the rest of the world nowhere.’

After that he would very likely let her catch cold by lazily omitting to take the wraps for her which Dick would never have forgotten. But then he would tell her that his oversight was intentional, since it furnished him with excuses for extra care; and, true or not, wasn’t the way he put it, and the kisses, and the petting, worth all the forethought which Dick would have substituted?

‘Heigh-o!’

With a prolonged yawn she walked slowly to the window, and threw it open.

‘Dick!’

Morrison was smoking at the farther end of the balcony, and he too had been brooding, for he wanted to find out where the mischief lay. In his bachelor days he had always had a comfortable assurance, which was none the less positive for being somewhat undefined, that as long as a man and his wife loved each other, there were but few hitches in the marriage state. Yet now, behold, he was finding one at every available turn. He had some time ago given up trying to share his pleasures with Olive; but what was the matter with him that he could not share hers? He had never thought particularly about it, but he did not suppose he was more selfish than most men, so why on earth couldn't he care for the novel over which she grew so excited, not for its own value, of course, but just because it did excite her? Why didn't it interest him that the big red-haired man who had made open love to his neighbour at the Titlis table-d'hôte had turned up again, and was making love to another woman here?

'I suppose I am not enough, what's-its-name? receptive or something, to please any woman properly,' was his dreary summing-up; and as he was in the mood to be retrospective, it is to

be regretted that he did not hit upon a little sentence which Olive had once spoken, and which held alike the key to his wife's character, and the answer to his present perplexities.

'I know Bernard was fond of me, because he told me so a dozen times a-day.'

Such poor tragedy as there was lay in that 'because.'

He was proceeding to catalogue himself under various unpleasant names, when Olive opened the window.

'Dick.'

'Yes.'

'I want to go home.'

'Home? Not to . . .'

She interrupted him.

'Yes, to Oaksdene. Why not, Dick?'

Morrison began smoking again.

'You remember that night I came to your rooms? You promised me then that as soon as we were married we should go and stay there, and entertain, and be happy. I am so horribly tired of all this wandering about, and this wretched scenery.'

She made a little grimace at the lake which fronted them, and stifled a second yawn.

'You know, Dick, this is what I find so annoying about scenery. It is always just water and mountains and things, so that it is very easy to confuse one place with another. And yet it is always differently arranged, as if on purpose to trip one up when it comes to discussing them at all.'

Morrison puffed away silently.

'You couldn't entertain now if you did go there,' he said at last. 'The season begins soon, and all the people will be in town.'

'Then let us go to town too,' she said at once. 'If you aren't keen about Oaksdene. . . . Oh, have you broken it? What a pity. . . . I say if you aren't keen about Oaksdene, we might as well go back at once and take a house.'

'If you are quite sure that will make you happy,' he said doubtfully, as he knocked the ashes out of his broken pipe. 'I have been hoping you would suggest this, Olive, for I don't know how long, but I didn't think you would care for London for a permanency, and the other is out of the question.'

'Why shouldn't I care?' Olive reminded him gently. 'Oaksdene is nothing to me. Why should it be?'

She did not ask him why it was out of the question. Probably it was on account of turning out his mother, to whom he was quite absurdly devoted, and with whom, for her own part, she had found it hard to get on during the week they spent together at the time of George's birth.

'If you wanted it why didn't you tell me?' she demanded suddenly. 'One evening, just after we were married, you said you thought it your solemn duty to be quite frank with me. Why didn't you, Dick?'

'What makes you remember that particular evening?'

Olive ceased fingering a little garnet heart which she had taken lately to wearing upon her watch-tag, and which was too paltry an ornament to have been one of her husband's gifts.

'You called me darling that night,' she said very slowly, and smiled at him.

Morrison smiled back, well pleased.

'We will go back to England as speedily as possible, Olive.'

'Yes.'

'You are quite sure this is exactly what you really wish?'

‘Yes—oh, yes.’

She shut the window abruptly, and went back to her easy-chair, and her boredom. Was ever man before such a wooden piece of insensibility! No, she wouldn’t cry. She had cried all her tears months ago, and besides it spoilt her eyes. But if only it had all been different, and if only . . . Her fingers closed unconsciously round the little red heart, and, loud enough for her husband to hear on the balcony, and to wonder, she suddenly laughed.

Bernard Cayle generally obtained what he liked, because he invariably knew what he wanted; and when one May morning he saw Olive driving down Piccadilly, he realised instantly that what he most wanted was to know her again. A nod to a cabman, a sympathetic smile on the face of that worthy, and he was bowling swiftly after her, intent upon discovering her present address.

‘Ten to one.’ He read the time as he passed Burlington House. ‘Then the chances are that she is going off to lunch, perhaps at home, perhaps at a friend’s house. I wish I dared pass her and have another look; but I don’t

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want her to see me yet. . . . Hullo! Knights-bridge? No, the Old Brompton Road. Now I wonder how much farther she is going.'

Some way, apparently; but the sight of the dark head some few yards in front gave plenty of food for thought, and he risked the chances that its owner might turn and recognise him. After all, it didn't matter very much, and he was inured to risks by now.

He felt an odd sense of triumph as he pursued her.

'She looked happier with me. Her lips didn't droop so,' he told himself several times; and the thought was a pleasant one.

The victoria turned into Ovington Square, and his cabman, with an odious amount of comprehension, for which Cayle could willingly have kicked him, drove down the opposite side of the stretch of green, and pulled in his horse at the farther end.

'Twelve A. 'Ouse with the yellow blinds, sir,' he said affably. 'Laidy's own 'ome, 'cause she walked straight in, and didn't arsk no questions. Where to now, sir? Station or club?'

Cayle laughed in spite of himself.

No, I'll get out here,' he said. 'I think you are a trifle too intelligent to suit me.'

To find a post-office and a directory was the next thing, and there he was at first nonplussed to find the house not entered.

'Wasn't occupied when that was compiled,' explained the clerk of whom he sought counsel. 'What was the name you were wanting?'

'I don't know.'

To lie over small matters Cayle held to be a mistake. It showed a lamentable poverty of resource, for one thing, and it laid one open to a constant chance of detection. On the present occasion he became vastly confidential.

'To tell you the truth, I have just seen a lady going into that house whom I used to know very well. But I can't remember her married name, and it would be awkward to call without knowing for whom to ask.'

The clerk nodded.

'I'll see if any of the men are in who might know, if you like. Can't do no harm, because they'll be entered in the next edition, and then you'd see for yourself.'

He whistled down the tube, and the answer came back.

'Now then, stupid, that's number 12. What is 12A? What? Oh, all right. Mr. Richard Morrison, sir. Mrs. Morrison will be the name you're wanting.'

Walking away from the office Cayle told himself that never in all his life had he been so thunderstruck. That she would marry some one he had felt pretty confident, and, indeed, had hoped it, since his own hands were tied for the time being, and he was too fond of her in his own selfish fashion not to be rendered uncomfortable when he pictured her starving. That she had married well was obvious by the display of wealth. But that she should have married Morrison of all men in the world, fairly amazed him. Why, Morrison was the fellow who had proposed to her at Wimbledon, the day before she ran away. Had he come across her again by chance—a hundred thoughts whirled through Cayle's brain—then, if so, he must be a prodigious fool. Or had she gone to him, for he knew her penniless and . . . Well, in that case he was one of the finest fellows he had ever come across.

Bernard Cayle absolutely glowed as he came to this conclusion. Philip drunk and Philip

sober were not two more completely different individuals than Cayle when his own wishes were concerned and Cayle when he was unprejudiced. When this latter self, he waxed tearful over the beauty of virtue and ran atilt at vice, at so much a column in the paper on whose staff he was, and every word of it he sincerely meant. The description of any particularly heroic deed came to be looked upon as his perquisite, and his pen had more than once been instrumental in alleviating some of the more crying wrongs of working womanhood.

But of Cayle when his personal desires clashed with this other self, the least said the better. Coo-coo, sang baby George in his nursery.

He went to work in a business-like way, and three days later was being cordially welcomed by Morrison at the club. Olive must have kept her own counsel.

Yes, he had been greatly interested in these recent discussions on the substitutes for the poorlaws in divers countries, as Mr. Cayle had rightly gathered from his own paper on the subject, and he was under an obligation to him for thus tendering further information.

‘What are the exact points on which you

are dubious?' Cayle asked; and after listening attentively to Morrison's detailed explanations was naturally able to reply intelligently. It chanced that he had spent a couple of months in Hungary some three years ago, and while there was keenly interested in the matter, but he now regretted to find that he could not be of much actual use. However, his diary and note-books were in his rooms behind the Brompton Oratory, and though they did not contain much solid information, there were some queer stories of the peasantry which were very much at Mr. Morrison's service. They might possibly help to popularise the subject if he ever thought of lecturing.

Morrison had thought of no such thing, but it is always pleasant to find an audience for one's pet hobby, and when he learnt that this new acquaintance was living at a stone's-throw from his own house, he begged him to bring the papers round to him on the following day.

'You needn't be afraid of disturbing my wife,' he added, when the other man demurred. 'I will give orders you are to be shown straight into my den, and we'll have a smoke. Will five

suit you? I don't know much about journalists' hours.'

Five suited admirably, Cayle said, but it was not much after four the next afternoon when he presented himself at the house with the yellow blinds, and asked for Mrs. Morrison.

It chanced that it was Olive's at-home day, and the room was half full when the servant announced Mr. Cayle. His mistress did not catch the name. She was standing near the window holding up a cloisonné and lacquered stool for the spectacled inspection of an old gentleman who was bending over it.

'Yes, it is an old Corean stool of audience. My husband only gave it to me this morning, and I want to find out something more of its history,' she said, and was turning to replace it when a man's hand was stretched from behind her, and a man's voice said—'Allow me.'

Olive did not turn. She held the stool for another half minute before relinquishing it, standing staring down at the strong shapely hand as if fascinated. She felt suddenly stiffened, as if her limbs only upheld her because they were too frozen to let her drop, and then as the hand took the stool and carried

it to a clear space at the other end of the room, she slowly realised that the stiffening sensation was one of overwhelming horror and amazement, and that her visitor was none other than Bernard Cayle.

‘I must introduce myself, Mrs. Morrison. My name is Cayle.’ He had crossed back to her, and all the room was at liberty to hear his explanation. ‘Your husband asked me to call to-day to go through some papers with him, but I am afraid I am a little earlier than he said. Do you think he will be long before . . . I beg your pardon.’

He moved aside as some people came up to make their adieux, and Olive followed them to the door.

‘Oh, yes, I shall remember. I shall be quite sure to remember. Thank you so much,’ she heard herself saying, and wondered dully what it was she was promising.

What was it she ought to do? Ring the bell, and order James . . . What, more people going? That would only leave two, no three, besides themselves. How dared he? Oh, how dared he? . . . If only she knew Dick safe out of the way until she could rid herself

of him, but Dick might come in at any moment. . . .

'Oh, I shall be quite sure to remember. Thank you so much.'

The words had fitted in so well before, but this time they seemed ill-chosen, for they were greeted with a bewildered look, and she had to catch them back with a laugh. . . . Only Mr. Lennox now. Would he stay long? No, not long, for apparently Mr. Lennox was rendered nervous by a hostess who addressed herself exclusively to him, and totally ignored her other guest.

As he departed, the clock struck the half hour.

Olive had been standing by the fire-place as she shook hands, and now she turned and lodged her elbows upon the shelf of the over-mantel, her back to the room. Cayle, who had remained by the window where she had left him, looked past her at her reflected self, and their eyes met in the glass.

'Why have you come?'

'To see you.'

'What do you want?'

'To see you.'

Her fury grew as she watched him, not so much that he should be there, as that she could ever have dwelt upon the thought of him with pleasure: not so much that she had delighted in his caresses at the time without instinctively guessing what manner of man he was, as that she could also have stooped so low as to recall them with regret during this past year of married life.

She turned and fronted him. Indignation had flushed her cheeks, and her curiously light eyes gleamed.

'I hate you,' she said softly. 'I loathe and despise myself that I could ever have cared. There is no one on all the earth I hate so much as you, and the more for coming here.'

'Why?' asked Cayle, gravely.

It was difficult to keep the exultation out of his voice. He had not looked for anything so easy to combat as her hatred.

'I mean, why more for coming here? Ellen is dead. You are married. I can do you no possible harm, and myself all possible good. I . . . I longed to see you.'

She shrank back a little.

'Don't. You used to say that. You mustn't

say it now, it is wicked.' Then she despised herself the more for showing she remembered. 'You are to go away at once, I will not have you here. Your presence is an insult to me ; an insult to the man who married me, and who is good to me in a way of which men such as you cannot even conceive.'

'And whom you love very dearly,' Cayle added.

The clock ticked on with an unwonted noisiness, and still he stood by the window and gazed at her steadily across the stretch of the room.

'He is such a good man,' Olive said presently.

Protestations were useless, she knew, when Cayle understood her so well, but if she could convince him that all her life now turned around Dick, he would leave her and go. Where he had once been first he would never endure being second even for the fleeting space of a solitary call. Men were like that, she knew ; she had often read it.

'He has made me believe again in everything which you broke down that day I found out. He married me at once, and the child bears his name. It is an honour to live with him, he is so

good. And he is always so kind too, to baby and me. I have no time to wish for anything before I have it, and the boy is better fathered than if he were his own son.'

'You must love him very dearly,' repeated Cayle.

For the first time he moved, and came a pace nearer her.

'I came to-day, because that longing to see you is very hard to stifle, and when the opportunity was given me, I could not resist it. You are so happy now that I thought your happiness would have made you merciful. You say it has not. Well, I would go away at once if you wish it,—I have always done what you wished,—but I can't. Your husband asked me to call to-day, and for your own sake I must not leave before he returns. Think what might be his conjectures.'

'But I shall tell him,' Olive cried. 'Do you think I would suffer him to meet you, and to welcome you to the house he has given me? I shall tell him the moment he comes in.'

'And wreck your own great happiness, and his? Oh no,' said Cayle gently, 'I don't think you will quite do that.' He spoke as if address-

ing an unreasonable child. 'Mr. Morrison and I met at the club, and as we have interests in common, he asked me to bring round some papers which we hoped might be of use to him. We shall have an hour together, and that will be the end of it.'

'But I must tell him. I ought to tell him. I ought to have told him first of all, but he would not listen.'

'You dare not tell him,' Cayle answered, with a sudden, sharp insistence, and crossing the room at last, he laid a hand upon her arm. 'The fates were against you, my poor child, and you have tried being homeless once. It cannot have been an experience you wish to repeat.'

'To repeat?' Olive's echo was breathless.

'Yes. He might . . . Mark, I don't say he would, but if I were you, I should not be inclined to risk it . . . He might be foolish enough to think our meeting at the club was premeditated. That, in fact, we,' a gesture made it clear he meant Olive and himself, 'had arranged it.'

Olive sat down, heart-sick. She felt hemmed in, and helpless. What was the use of fighting him?

She glanced up at the clock, and then back at him, as he drew forward a chair and seated himself, and when he presently began discussing that particular part of London, and asked if she were not relieved to find there was a probability of the unsightly Oratory being faced at last, she managed, when she heard her husband's step upon the stairs, to answer these commonplaces with her usual composure.

Morrison came in radiant. He was always more genial, Olive had noticed, with new friends than he was with any of the old, and she had wondered over this, since it was so unlike him.

'I got shown up here by mistake, and have been inflicting myself upon Mrs. Morrison. I am afraid I was a bit early,' Cayle said, as the men shook hands.

'Oh, nonsense. The wife was delighted to meet you—eh, Olive? Can I have some tea? Don't be alarmed; we will keep our arguments for downstairs if I may have a cup first. I walked home, and I'm thirsty.'

'You must ring, and have some fresh tea made.'

Where had he been; from whence had he walked home? Olive would have given worlds

just then to show how thoroughly they were in sympathy, but she did not know. If he had come in and kissed her, as Bernard himself had always done; or if she could only have said casually, 'That letter you were wanting came by the last post.' But she knew nothing of his letters, for the servants saw to that.

'I am so sorry you should have to wait while they make it,' she said apologetically, after she herself had rung to give the order, and had tried to hasten its carrying out with much wifely solicitude. 'It was very stupid of me not to keep some for you, but I have had so many callers to-day.'

'Of course you didn't think of it. I so seldom come in here,' Morrison said placidly. 'Have you and Mr. Cayle been exchanging travelling experiences? We are just home from a prolonged stay on the continent, Cayle, but I am afraid my wife hardly shares your views as to its joys. You must inoculate her with some of them if ever we take up our wandering habits again.'

The other man laughed.

'But, you know, I am not quite such an enthusiast as you are. A thorough change of

scene and occupation is very delightful for a time, I grant you, but for thorough lazy enjoyment give me the river, and a boat, and an appreciative companion.'

'I see.' Morrison got up and busied himself at the tea table. 'Thank you, James. Will either of you have a second cup, now it is here? No? An appreciative companion?—well, I don't know. I always think the river is one of the few things one can manage very well alone.'

Cayle smiled slightly. Olive felt an insane desire to scream.

'Ferguson—do you know him? an oldish man, nearly white—was talking to me after you went, yesterday. He was in the Austrian Tyrol, and suggests . . .'

Morrison was thirsty, as he had said. He drank several cups of tea, and prosed on the while, astride his hobby. Cayle, better up in his subject than he had been yesterday, amiably whetted the interest of the husband, and abstained from trying to include the wife, rewarding himself by an occasional glance in her direction.

These glances momentarily increased her

nervousness. Why, since he insisted upon looking at her, didn't he look her in the face? Why did his eyes rest constantly on a level with her clasped hands? When she found that he was looking at the bunch of charms which hung from her watch, her fingers stole round them to hide them from him. The rough edges of the garnets seemed to grate on her finger-tips, and his eyes, as he smiled again, to stab her.

Morrison stopped suddenly in the midst of a sentence.

'There is Georgie calling to you, Olive.—Nurse.' He raised his voice. 'Bring him in, and let's have a look at him.'

'No, no. He is not to come. I won't have it.' Her own vehemence startled Olive. She laughed. 'Dick, you are incorrigible. This isn't the nursery, and Mr Cayle . . .'

'. . . loves children, said Cayle gaily. 'Ah, that's right!' as the child and his nurse appeared in the doorway. 'It is an old rule, isn't it? that if a man wishes to be tolerated in a household, the best way is to begin with the children? Here, come to me, my fine fellow, and let's make friends.'

Georgie, however, flatly declined this proposi-

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tion by stiffening himself in the maid's arms, and puckering up his face in readiness for a howl. But catching sight of Morrison, he changed his mind, and broke into an imperative 'Da-da,' which resulted in an exchange of nurses.

'Dick,' said Olive, pleadingly, 'let him go up to his tea. It really is a mistake to delay him like this when he comes in from his walk. Come to mother, Georgie-boy. I will carry him up myself, Dick.'

When she had gone, the two men descended to Morrison's den, each too pre-occupied to notice the pre-occupation of the other. Cayle's thoughts were a tangle; Morrison's, very clear, but very gloomy.

His poor Olive was getting all her old restlessness back again, and he knew by experience that he could do nothing to fight it. He wished that there were something doing that night that he might take her to it, but they had exhausted the theatres, and they did not know many people as yet. It was a pity, for it would have amused and occupied her better than an evening alone with him. Why shouldn't he get Cayle to stop, though? He rather liked this man who talked so easily, seemed so easily pleased, and, above

all, who was fresh to them both ; and though Olive had not seemed particularly struck by him in the drawing-room upstairs, that was probably because she was not quite herself to-day. For Cayle was undoubtedly the sort of man she took to as a rule, and . . . Yes, he would certainly get him to stop.

‘ Baby didn’t take much to the gentleman, did he, ma’am ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ But there ! When the master’s about, there’s no getting him to take any notice of any one else, is there, my pretty ? I was saying to Mary only the other day, ma’am, how strange it was, for the master he is always so grave-like, and he isn’t one to play with children, like lots of gentlemen I’ve seen.’

‘ No.’

Olive left her boy in the nursery, and the maid to answer her own wonderments, and went downstairs again as far as her own room. It was still chilly in the evenings, and a small fire had been lighted, and the curtains drawn. Olive locked the door after her, and laid herself full length on the bed.

‘ I can cry now,’ she said softly to the dancing

shadows upon the ceiling, and lay staring at them with dry unflinching eyes.

Bernard had come, Bernard had gone, and she had loathed him. There was security in the thought. It made her feel so much safer, and be so very sure that she must care for her husband far more ardently than she had imagined. She had dwelt so much lately upon the many points where they were at variance, that she had fancied herself less in love and less happy than formerly. But evidently this was a mistake for she must care for Dick, or she would not so have detested Bernard. And yet how she had loved that man. Now he had gone, she could think of this with equanimity, and without any feeling that she ought not, since there was clearly no harm in thinking of a man whose mere presence had become so obnoxious. No moralist, however stern, could have objected, nor denied the invincibility of her position.

Yes, she had loved him, in what seemed to be years and years ago, and robbed of their subsequent knowledge and misery, those nine brief months had been the most blissful of her life. They had taken a small cottage at Staines, and while the early spring had still lasted, they had

made of it what Olive called a warehouse to hold their belongings, and themselves at night, while the days were spent in beautifying it in the shops in town, or in dawdling through the newly opened picture-galleries, where Cayle combined art-criticism and love-making to their mutual satisfaction. At that time he was writing only for the weeklies, and could generally manage to go in with the general public. On the occasions when he was forced to be present on a press day, Olive was left at home.

‘I don’t intend to introduce you to any of my friends yet awhile, or to run the risk of meeting them,’ he said to her. ‘If I did, I should never have you quite to myself again. You don’t mind, do you, darling?’

Then came warmer weather. Cayle’s work expanded, and he went rushing up to town every day, quitting her with a caress, however fine he might be running the train, turning at the corner with a smile and wave of the hand, and never coming back to her without some gift for herself or the house. It often represented but a few pence, but she liked his way of giving it.

Olive began crying quietly.

Dick had brought her a bracelet the day before. It was a very perfect one, and she had since told herself repeatedly that it meant far more from him than was conveyed by his grave 'You wanted this. I ought to have got it before.' But if Bernard brought her a penny bunch of violets he would demand kisses in payment, and would deliciously waste a whole quarter of an hour while he tried the effect of the flowers at different points of her gown. Olive knew those magnificent stones must have cost her husband some self-denial; and she often doubted Bernard's asseverations that he had walked miles to please her, when violets were surely procurable at every street corner. She knew in the one case what the silence covered, and in the other she disbelieved the protestations. But what of that? It was the manner of the giving which was everything to her, and Dick seldom kissed her except good-night.

Olive raised herself from the bed, and wrenching the little garnet heart from its holdings, she dropped it into the fire, thrusting it down with unnecessary force. Her lips had closed into a very thin line.

'If he had stayed,' she said to herself with

helpless conviction, 'if he had stayed, I should have grown wicked. I should have grown so used to seeing him as Dick's friend that at times I should have forgotten. And when Dick was making me feel very unpetted, then at times I should remember that I used to be loved in the only way I can understand.'

She watched the locket as it cracked, and yawned slowly open. It seemed to mouth at her.

'I know what Dick thinks ; he has never told me, but I know quite well. He thinks it is somehow wrong and unwomanly to long so. He thinks I ought to receive them in a gentle, graceful sort of way, but not long for them, not *pray* for them. . . . But I'm not bad, I know I'm not. I'm just like Georgie. He crows for kisses and love-words, and holds out his arms to be taken in mine, and I only want what he wants. . . . I think I need them. . . . I believe they are part of my life and my health, and without them I feel such an awful loneliness . . . oh ! such a loneliness . . . that it numbs me, it terrifies me ! . . . I can't believe he loves me unless he tells me so, and I shall die if I am not loved. Ah, Dick, Dick !'

She stretched up to the mantel-shelf above

her head, and took down a photograph of Morrison, crying over it, and kissing the pictured face, and then holding it to her heart and rocking backwards and forwards as she might have rocked her child.

‘Won’t you? Can’t you?’ she murmured. ‘Dear, dear Dick. “Yes, Olive,” and “No. Olive,” and “It shall be just as you like.” I don’t want my own way, I want yours, but I want to be thwarted like this. Say “Oh, nonsense, my sweetheart,” or “I won’t cash it for you unless you light a cigarette for me, and take the first whiff yourself.” . . . We can’t go on in your way. We’ve tried and failed, and it would be crueller still if Bernard had not gone away. So you’ll try in mine, won’t you, Dick? Can’t you?’

The portrait had grown warm in contact with her own warm face, and she could almost cheat herself into believing the pressure was returned.

That decided her. She would do it. She had often planned an appeal to Morrison, when she would say to him very much what she had just said to his picture. Until to-night her pride had stood in her way, but the meeting with Cayle had shaken her. She was frightened at what

might have happened had he stayed, and she longed as she had never longed before to bring about a fuller understanding between herself and her husband. And that could only be done by absolute frankness. Possibly he would despise her; more probably he would think her hysterical; but that must be risked. She was horribly afraid of her own imaginings, and if he could not be made to see. . . . Olive shivered. 'He must see. He shall.'

The photograph was put back in its place; eyes bathed; and the maid rung for. She had been apt to be careless of late when they were dining alone, but to-night she would put on her loveliest gown, and wear yesterday's bracelet. Then she would be in the drawing-room quite early, and be seated in the full glow of the lamp, that he might come in and find her there, and be pleased in spite of himself. She would be bright at dinner, and interest him by talking newspaper talk,—'Does Parliament sit during the season, Sophy? Are you quite sure?' and then afterwards she would stay with him while he was smoking, and begin.

'Do I look nice, Sophy? Do you really think I look nice?'

From the drawing-room she crept to the head of the stairs to listen.

'How late Bernard has stopped.' She was angry. 'Dick is only moving to let him out now.'

With the opening of the door of his den, she tip-toed back to her seat.

'I wonder if he will come in here before going to dress.'

She could hear his tread approaching, and moved her arm that the stones might sparkle more brilliantly.

'Everything is going to be quite different now,' she said to herself resolutely. 'I'm going to be more to him, poor fellow, than I have been before; and he is going to say, "Good-night, darling. But isn't two a very short allowance?"'

The door opened. She looked up eagerly. Morrison was on the threshold, and behind him, his face aglow with admiration, stood Bernard Cayle.

'Olive,' said her husband's voice, 'I have been trying to persuade this man to stay to dinner, but he won't in morning clothes without your express permission. Tell him how glad we shall be if he will.'

CHAPTER IV

IT is one thing to get a footing, and another to maintain it, but Bernard Cayle was not a stupid man. By the end of a week Morrison was beginning to regret that this new acquaintance got on so much better with him than he did with his wife ; and, in a fortnight, Olive herself was inclined to mock at her own heroics at their first meeting. For half the times he was in the house she never saw him, and when perforce he called especially upon her after that first dinner, he merely left cards without even asking if she were in.

That evening had been wretched enough. All she had gone through in the previous two hours had come back to her with redoubled force during that hideous meal, with the added misery that she could not now let herself go. The men had laughed and chatted together, and after Morrison's well-meant efforts to keep the talk to topics which usually interested her had

met with frozen monosyllables, it broke away to sport and country interests, which Cayle was well able to feed, if he were not so much at home in them as his host.

‘Pass my wife the olives, will you?’

‘Mrs. Morrison does not care for olives. Very few ladies do.’

The pause was almost imperceptible between assertion and comment.

Olive held out her hand for the glass without speaking. Why did the one man remember, and the other not? She ate the fruit stolidly, and found it more detestable than ever.

But since that first night there had been nothing of this, though he came and went perpetually.

‘He is the very man I have been wanting to get hold of for years,’ Morrison alleged, and Olive’s fears gradually took to themselves wings.

To brace oneself for battle, and then to find nothing to fight is annoying at all times, and she felt ridiculous in her own eyes. If he were indifferent, why was he there at all? If he cared, why hide it so successfully, instead of allowing her the opportunity of conquering both herself and him? When she read a novel, or

saw a play in which a melodramatic scene could be wrested to fit her own case, she imagined herself the heroine, and Cayle the villain she was denouncing in a flow of unimpeachable virtue and finely rounded sentences.

‘I only live on thoughts of past happiness.’

‘Sir! How dare you address such a speech to me.’

With the wisdom of her twenty years she deemed such imaginings a proof of safe-standing. It would have required another twenty at least to persuade her that she was merely solacing herself for emotions to which circumstances forbade an outlet.

‘You need not talk only weather-talk to me,’ she said sullenly one afternoon.

It was late, and no one else was calling. The Morrisons knew but few people, and with them they were not popular. Morrison would have liked his wife to be a success, but he did not know how to bring it about, and friends of her own she had none. He was handicapped too, by never wholly shaking off the dread that some one might recognise her, and ask awkward questions; while Olive had grown too listless to take the trouble to entertain.

So only Cayle had the benefit of the irrelevant remark which broke into an account of something to which she had paid not the slightest heed.

'No?' he said, and waited.

Her foot beat a tattoo upon the carpet.

'That day . . .'

'Yes?

'What did you do?'

'After you went, you mean?' Cayle looked at her curiously. 'I'm afraid I can't tell you. I have often wondered myself how I got through the next few hours.'

He had naturally a low, rather indolent-sounding voice, and, in spite of his words, it did not alter. His hands remained inert. Olive asked herself if she had lost the power to move him.

'What did you do?' she insisted.

'Behaved like a . . . well, like a maniac, I suppose you would have said. Cursed myself, and poor Ellen, and everything on the earth or under it, except you. Made the wildest, maddest plans in which murder and heaven knows what came in, but which had the one ending of persuading you to come back again.'

I seem to have spent the night in writing you letters into which I put all you would not listen to when you were there.'

'Letters?'

'And burning them,' ended Cayle.

He appeared resolved to say no more than was absolutely demanded. Olive told herself again that she was on very safe ground so long as she compelled him to her will instead of yielding to his. She had at least the right to know what he had done with himself. The right of merest friendship gave her that.

'Go on.'

'To what?'

'To next day. What did you do then?'

'I went up to town.'

'To "Strathallan House. Tulse Hill," of course.' It was the address which had headed Mrs. Cayle's letter. 'And you saw her. Was she as ill as she said?'

He nodded.

'She was almost dying then, poor thing, or she would not have sent for me. We had not corresponded for nearly three years, and I had not even seen her for more than two. We were good enough friends at one time, but we

harassed and bothered each other a good deal, and so we parted. She sent the letter to the office, and it was forwarded from there.'

'I remember,' said Olive shortly.

He was an enigma to her which she knew it was hopeless to dream of solving. Why did he say 'poor thing?' She did not want to grudge it to the dead, but it sounded strange. She sighed, and he looked up quickly.

'You are getting tired, Mrs. Morrison. Why don't you sit down? Your husband will say you are looking overdone to-night.'

'My husband,' said Olive, bitterly, 'may possibly *think* it. If he does, he will spend ten minutes cudgelling his brains as to whether I have been annoyed, or bored, or worried; whether I have driven too far or not far enough. But in any case his sole suggestion will be that I should eat a bigger dinner to rest myself. He won't *say* anything about how I look.'

'No?' said Cayle politely. 'You are so young, you know, and women change. You used not to appreciate so considerate a silence.'

Olive caught up his words quickly.

'Go back to what you were saying before. What happened after that?'

‘Nothing. She lingered on for nearly another six months, and I went to see her whenever she sent for me. She died early last June.’

‘Alone?’

‘With the people of the house, of course ; but no, I wasn’t there.’

‘But alone?’

Cayle hesitated. He did not quite understand what she meant. Then a light broke on him.

‘Oh no,’ he said, ‘we had no child ;’ and Olive felt a shamefaced sense of relief.

Right or wrong, honour or no honour, it is hard to reconcile a woman to the thought of kisses given by lips she knows to lips she knows not. Little Georgie was forbidden the drawing-room for fear of chance callers, but, nevertheless, his mother was glad that Cayle had no other child.

‘I am going now,’ she said suddenly, ‘and you must go too. I don’t want you to wait for Dick.’

He rose at once.

‘I am very seldom up here. Would you rather I stayed downstairs altogether, and then you would not see me? Or would you rather I arranged to meet your husband at the club?’

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'It is a matter of perfect indifference to me.' This was more in the style of her imaginary heroine, and she repeated it. 'I am quite indifferent to what you do. I only asked you some questions to-night because . . .'

'Because . . .'

Cayle stood by the open door awaiting the end of her sentence.

He had not even attempted to shake hands.

'Good-night,' said Olive. 'No, do as you like. It cannot possibly matter to me if you are here or not. You come as Dick's friend.'

It was so obvious that he might have irritated her by a telling answer and dramatic exit, that when he merely bowed and went away, she was not unnaturally angry. She would have liked her decisions disputed.

The next day Morrison went down to Oakdene. He had only been there once for a flying visit since his return, and so many matters demanded a personal decision, that both sister and agent were clamorous for his presence. His mother said nothing.

Time passed rapidly with the two in town. Olive did not care to go out without her husband, she said, and if that husband's friend

chose to call daily, it clearly was not her business to prevent him.

The fifth day they drifted into a talk in which he had the words and she the silences, and which was started by her receiving a letter.

'It is from Dick. He writes every day,' and she put it down.

'Don't let me be in the way.'

'You are not.'

'Read it then.'

'I will read it to-night.'

'I am glad he writes,' Cayle said meditatively. 'Happy marriages would be more plentiful if more men behaved like Morrison.'

Olive stretched herself languidly on the couch. He went on speaking.

'If you had been bored by the rhapsodies of as many lovers as I have, you could put your finger on the usual hitch six months at least before it comes off. When it does, ten cases out of eleven it is the man's fault.' He paused to place the cushion more comfortably under her head. 'I'm not talking about the *femme incomprise* of olden days, nor the 'new woman,' whoever she may be, of these. I am talking of

the everyday non-heroic lovable woman who . . .
I beg your pardon !'

In withdrawing his hand it had touched her cheek. Olive did not move.

'Well, in these lovers and their confidences, where the future misery lies is in the very manner of them. I have walked Hampshire lanes for hours with a man who raved about how his Laura—I think it was Laura—would walk there with him, and botanise, and play Lady Bountiful to his tenants, and love the very soil for the excellent reason that he did. It never occurred to him that as Laura was Mayfair to her fingertips, she might abhor the programme. It never entered into his wildest flights of fancy that being a lover he might yield up all this, and run on her lines in town. And the same with all the rest. Good, bad, or indifferent, they all want women to come into their lives, instead of going out into the lives of the women.'

Olive smiled lazily, and surveyed her grey silk stockings and grey shoes with much friendly interest. The match was perfect, and her feet were small. She was thinking she had heard all this very often before, and wondered when he was going to make his point.

‘I am boring you?’

She nodded.

‘I bore myself too, pretty frequently, with this same eternal unfitness of things. I don’t mind men being selfish, for their wives and daughters don’t mind it, so why should I? But since I am one of them myself, I do object to them being such consummate idiots.’

His unusual restlessness began to affect her. As he moved about the room, altering the books and china, she ceased smiling, and finally sat upright. This new mood of his recalled those old moods in the cottage at Staines, in which he used to work himself up to the necessary pitch before fighting some newspaper grievance, and she had often debated how far they were genuine. In this she wronged him, for Cayle’s method of lashing himself into the frame of mind he desired at the moment, was much after the style of De Musset’s preparations for verse-making, and quite as genuine,—when he got there.

‘The crying waste! The foolery of it all!’ he broke out presently, stopping suddenly at a foot’s space from her, and his face kindling with righteous indignation. ‘All you want, the majority of you, is the gratification of one

special whim, and because we haven't the sense to see what it is, nor the wit to give it you when we do see, we bring around us broken hopes, broken lives, and—finality.'

He paused, as if for a new paragraph.

'That fellow Clifford would have got his Laura to drop town, and they would have been as happy as larks, if only he had thought fit to stand a musical evening when she wanted it, instead of sleeping through all her best songs. And Morrison . . .' He stopped again ; picked up the fallen letter ; pointedly hesitated. 'And Morrison understands perfectly that the one way to make another kind of woman happy is by writing her a whole sheaf of love-phrases whenever she is too far off to hear them spoken.'

She broke her silence to remark on the lack of sequence in his deductions, and he retorted that on the contrary he had sought opposing instances. He smiled as he spoke, weighing the letter absently in his fingers, and when she stretched out her hands to take it, he put the letter into them with one hand, and held them fast with the other.

'Would it be a crime if I kissed them Olive? They are so pretty and dimpled.'

Three days later, Morrison returned to town. He had been intensely irritated by his sister's refusal to believe in any of his alleged reasons for not having been more at Oaksdene, and it was not calculated to soothe him, the finding amongst the few cards which were scattered on the hall-table, the name of Mr. Henry Talbot. He drew the bit of offending pasteboard apart from the others, and turned to the servant.

‘When did this gentleman call?’

‘Yesterday, sir, and again to-day.’

Morrison glared at the card, and waited for the man to say more. He felt he would have given his soul at that moment to ask if Olive had received him, and how long he had stopped; but he could not lower his self-respect by stooping to spy on her, and after vainly awaiting farther information, he asked where she was.

‘In the nursery, sir. Shall I bring up dinner? The mistress has had hers.’

Morrison assented, and when it came he made the meal last as long as possible. Of course, it was no fault of Olive's that Talbot had called, but all the same he felt it would be an impossibility to go to her just immediately. He was half way through his second pipe, when it

occurred to him to ring and ask if she were still in the nursery. Somehow he did not want to go to her there. He was informed she had been there all day; she had not left Master Georgie all the time.

Morrison was amazed. 'Is he ill?'

'We thought he was dyin', sir,' James answered, and vanished to carry this food for gossip below stairs.

Morrison half rose, and then changed his mind. Had to-day brought the confirmation of his old suspicion? 'He came yesterday, and again to-day,' because Georgie was ill. . . . Then . . . *Because he was ill* . . . Then she must have sent for him. The conclusion seemed logical, and for the first time he felt direct bitterness against his wife. His face was not good to see, and when at last he forced himself to go upstairs, he did it haunted with the thought that had he still been at Oaksdene, Talbot might have come back for fresh news upon the morrow.

Olive was alone in the nursery, holding the moaning child in her arms, and apparently quite unhinged with grief.

'I sent them all away. I won't have any

one touch him but me. Aren't you very late, Dick?'

He began explaining that he knew nothing of the illness, but she interrupted him.

'It doesn't matter. Nothing matters but Georgie. The doctor was here early in the evening, and he says to-night will decide it. But he couldn't stop. Every one is ill, he says—just as if they mattered when there is Georgie. Don't turn up the lamp; it disturbs him.'

She was pacing the dimly-lit room, and Morrison followed her with his eyes. How could he nourish hard thoughts of her, poor child! at such a time.

'What is the matter with him, Olive?'

'He caught cold,' she answered dully, 'and now it is inflammation, and I think it is bronchitis, too. Listen to his breathing.'

'Wouldn't he be quieter in bed? You are knocking yourself up, and making me horribly anxious about you. Did you go to bed last night? Have you eaten anything?'

She laughed, as she came back into the circle of the lamplight.

'Quieter in bed?' she echoed scornfully. 'Quieter away from me? You never under-

stand us. Can't you see he wants to *feel* I love him?'

She sat down on a low chair which almost faced his, and the baby lay on her knees between them. Morrison scanned the tiny pained face, and the child recognised him, and caught his finger in its feeble hold.

'I have never seen illness,' Olive said, miserably, 'and you must have, often, in the cottages. Will he live, Dick?'

'I don't know,' Morrison said, hoarsely. 'His pulse is very faint, but then I never felt it before.'

He tried to look into the half-closed eyes, but the attempt conveyed nothing to him, for instead of those thin lines of blue, what he actually saw was Oaksdene, and what he heard was not the laboured breathing, but an exultant voice, which cried: 'A son of your own may inherit, after all. After all, you may not stain your race by this nameless blood.'

He flung up his head, and encountered his wife's eyes.

'Pray he may live, Dick. You are such a good man, God will listen to you.'

Pray? He stared at her. *He* pray that the child might live?

'Don't you hear?' she demanded, feverishly. 'I want you to pray—pray out loud that Georgie may live.' Her voice seemed to him far away, and yet to be shrieking at him. 'Pray for him, Dick.'

I will go for the doctor, Olive. You mustn't despair.' He felt like a criminal in her presence. 'I will get a man who will stay here the night with us. I will do all I possibly can for him.'

'But I want you to pray.' Olive broke into a torrent of tears. 'Don't you care if he dies?'

Her eyes held his, and he knew they had betrayed him when he saw the stony horror which grew in her own. She snatched the baby fingers from him.

'I will go for the doctor,' Morrison repeated, doggedly.

During his absence, and while, unable to find a cab at that late hour, he was running at the top of his speed, following the doctor from house to house with the idea of bringing him back with him, the crisis passed, and the child fell into a natural sleep. Leaving him to the nurse, Olive went down to Bernard Cayle, who had been calling perpetually for news, and now was

waiting in the little smoking-room on the ground floor. Her eyes were glittering, but they softened instantly when she saw how pale and anxious he looked. He held out his arms, and she went straight into them.

CHAPTER V

POSSESSED of the strong recuperative power of very young children, the next two or three days saw little Georgie practically well again. During them Morrison put heavy pressure upon himself, and finally asked his wife if she would care to take the child down to Oaksdene. He would be stronger in the country, and Adela . . .

She interrupted him curtly. She did not wish to go to Oaksdene.

Was she quite sure? Morrison urged, refusing to admit any sense of relief. Would she prefer the South coast? He had always heard the Bournemouth pines were famous things for picking one up. Or if she liked, he could run down to the Isle of Wight, and take lodgings at Ventnor or somewhere.

Olive listened to his suggestions with a curious feeling of apathy, akin to that with which those dying listen to summer plans, listen, knowing that to them no summer will ever come.

‘We might go next week,’ said Morrison, busy over maps and railway guides.

If only he had been less considerate. She did not in the least recognise she was going to break his heart. From time immemorial it has been the curse of women of Olive’s type, this inability to believe in affection which has a different outlet to their own. That Dick would ever care very much was a supposition at which she would have laughed; but she knew he would be distressed and upset for the time being, that he would be inexpressibly galled by people’s comments, and she was sorry for him, in a fainter degree, with the same kind of sorrow which she felt for herself.

She surreptitiously kissed a Bradshaw before handing it to him, and when his fingers touched the spot, she felt oddly thrilled by the knowledge of how it would be if he suddenly turned to her, and made hot love, and kissed . . .

‘Yes, the 10.30 will do. I shall run down to Ventnor to-morrow,’ concluded Morrison.

He put up his papers, and hurried away to get ahead with work which to-morrow’s absence would inconvenience.

‘I must bring Georgie,’ Olive had said, and it

was for his recovery she had been waiting, but, when the next evening she was in the nursery, at this last moment doubts began to assail her. She had given the nurse a holiday, and such of his clothes as she thought he needed were already packed, but when it was time to go to the inner room to wake and dress him, for the first time she hesitated.

Carefully shading the light she was carrying she bent over the little cot.

'Baby,' she said very softly, as she drew down the blankets the better to view him, 'sweeting boy, don't wake up. Listen to mother.'

Flushed with sleep the child lay warm and beautiful, with tiny naked feet up-drawn, and with pink moist little fists loosely clenched upon his breast. His mouth, of the same vivid geranium red as her own, was pursed as if for kisses, and as she spoke the faintest possible sigh escaped him, as though he refused to be wooed from a dreamland of content.

'Listen,' said Olive, 'I am going away, my darling, and I am going to leave you behind.'

She turned to stare with steady unwinking eyes at the light, and back again at the sleeping child.

‘Dick will teach you I am dead, and he will never let you grow up to think me wicked. But there are the servants. . . .’

She looked again at the steady flame of the candle, as if the darkened room, and her own murmur to this unconscious majesty of innocence, would shake her nerve unless she protected it by commonplace.

‘. . . And if the servants tell you I never really cared, my pretty, or I should not have left you behind, you are not to believe them, Georgie. . . I leave you because . . .’

Very deliberately, and with unfaltering hand, she placed the candle on the mantelshelf above his head, and knelt down beside the cot, her face upon a level with his own.

‘. . . because I trust him most. He is a good man, baby, and he will be good to you always. But Bernard? . . . There is only his love to hold by, and perhaps that will go.’ She shivered. ‘I’ll risk it for myself, but I won’t risk it for you. *You* must stay with Dick.’

Very quietly she leaned her head on the pillow, and let it touch his rose-leaf cheek, and then terrified lest the throbbing of her temples should awaken him, she drew away again, and

with the utmost carefulness raised herself to her feet.

‘Good-bye, my sweet ; my prince of babydom ; my . . .’

Something had suddenly stood in her throat, and strangled the words. She turned instantly and gazed so long at the light, that when she glanced back at her child her eyes were dazzled, and thus her last remembrance of him was as bathed in a mysterious halo, which seemed to shut her away and leave her outside.

The Ventnor train had been delayed, and it was past eleven when Morrison reached home. He let himself in with his latch-key, and went at once to the smoking-room, where, lying on the table at the side of the tray which had been placed ready for him, he found a letter from his wife. She often wrote him little notes if there were anything to say, and she had either gone out or did not want to be disturbed, so he opened a soda, and methodically jotted down the expenses of the day, before reading it.

He had picked it up when his servant entered with eyes glued to the envelope, and hoping to be questioned ; but Morrison was spared this last indignity, for he merely answered that he

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wanted nothing, and the man could go to bed, and did not open the note until he was alone.

Half a page only. Bernard Cayle was Henderson, and it was Dick who had brought him home. And she had gone to him. Because he loved her most.

Cold and grey was the early dawn as it stole into the room; cold and grey, very bloodless and grey, was the motionless figure on which it fell. For hours Morrison had sat there staring, with eyes that saw nothing, at the crumpled paper. His jaw had dropped somewhat, as drops the jaw of the dead. Earlier in that night his dry tongue had clacked spasmodically against his teeth, in the stead of the sobs a lesser anguish might have wrung, but it had quieted now, and he was absolutely still.

The glimmering light grew bolder, and struck fully on the chilled hands, and the scrap of paper which attested his dishonour, but even this fresh witness could not shake him from his lethargy. Lamplight had looked on it, daylight would prove it: why spur his benumbed wits into deciding whether this hideous thing, this actual writing, should be destroyed before the

sun-gleams came to jeer at it? . . . Destroyed? He could not lift finger, or say word. He could not even think. Something was chaining him.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. Stealing down the silences of the deserted house there came a tremulous feeble cry, the fitful wailing of a little child.

AN ACQUAINTANCE RENEWED

MR. Francis Digby had become a success. He had only had five years of London life, and for two of them had been happy, starving the while indifferently well. Then he had fallen into wrong hands ; there had been a tragic interlude of four months ; and he had started again with his views of life readjusted. It was at this time he wrote a novel under the pseudonym of Jason Smart, and in it he ran a-muck at every received canon of God and man. He was not vicious by nature, and he would have pooh-poohed the ethics of half he wrote had he reviewed it as the work of another man ; but the bitterness begotten of recent experience took refuge in audacity, and forthwith grew by what it fed on. When he found he had stumbled across a short cut to fame, he naturally pursued the road the more ardently, and a second novel followed the first. When a man wields a bludgeon instead of a stick, most of us look on it as a sign of

power, without waiting to gauge the accuracy of the blow; so Digby speedily got himself talked about, and being possessed of real ability, he managed to retain the niche the critics had made him. Whenever discussions were necessary to fillip up certain papers, his pen was in much requisition, and when unsigned, his articles would draw forth a volley of abuse from more commonplace and decidedly more respectable people, who denounced him in no measured terms as atheistical, and beyond the social pale.

Digby apparently cared neither for the ostracism of an unknown portion of the public, nor for the adulation of his own set; but he stuck to his colours, and when, after various attempts, he believed himself thoroughly in love, he and she agreed upon the subject, and dispensed with the 'time-worn formulæ' of marriage.

'You shall be as happy as the day is long, Nettie,' he said, 'and so shall I.' But somehow he didn't look it.

The weather was tolerably inviting when, one evening late in autumn, he suddenly bethought himself that as he particularly wanted to see a man named Lucas, and the said Lucas was pretty sure to be at an 'At Home' the Artists'

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Club was giving that night, he had better go there and find him. So he went, and, failing in his search, was standing moodily in the doorway once more to scan the passing crowds, when his glance was arrested by the direct gaze of a woman at the opposite side of the room. Another minute, and they were shaking hands.

‘Meg!—by all that is wonderful! Why, what good wind blows you here?’

His face had changed: he looked bright and interested. Now that he saw her, he recollected suddenly how fond he had always been of Meg, though it was five years since they had met.

‘We are at the Langham just for to-night.’ There was the faintest touch of northern burr in her speech, but so faint that it rather awoke association than gave the impression of being actually there. ‘Father and I start for Cannes to-morrow. Some people called Trevor brought me here to-night. Shall I . . .?’

‘Don’t introduce me,’ he said hastily. ‘I want to have you all to myself. Come into the corridor. Here! By these palms, will that suit you? Let me shift that cushion—now! Meg, you are looking exactly the same, and I feel a century older. How do you manage it?’

She laughed.

‘Do I look the same? I am thirty, you know. But there is nothing in my life to change me very much. The village, and the dear people, and the parish talk, it is all very much the same.’

He sat silent, surveying her with a delight that fairly amazed him. Latterly he had not thought often of Meg, but before then it had always been pleasant to recall her as possessed of a dual charm. One of them was that no one had ever thought so extravagantly well of him as did she; and the other was that she was the one woman with whom he felt he could go any length of friendship without the fear of falling in love. That she was some years his senior, and he had known her all his life, may possibly have had something to do with this.

‘Do they still wrangle about that right of way?’

‘Yes.’

‘And the Vicar is still alive?’

‘Oh, yes!’

‘And the dear old Colonel? Tell me about your father, Meg?’

It was not long before they were deep in his account of early struggles.

‘You never wrote to us,’ she said reproachfully, ‘and I lost touch of you when you left those lodgings,’ and Meg’s eyes were eloquent comment as they clouded or sparkled. Once they glistened.

‘My poor boy!—and you were actually hungry!’ she said. ‘Oh, I am so proud of you that you didn’t give in!’

Presently she told him she knew of one of his London friends, and challenged him to guess which.

He shook his head lazily, thinking less of her question than of what a pleasurable sensation she was giving him. He had quite forgotten all these foolish high-flown ambitions of his, and to renew the acquaintance of his dead and gone self had a piquancy about it for which he was grateful.

‘Jason Smart.’

Digby felt taken aback. He wondered how much she knew, as he slowly opened and shut her fan. Then he glanced at her again, and felt ashamed of his own suspicions. It was absurd to fancy that Meg could ever mean more or less than she actually said.

‘Jason Smart?’ he repeated. ‘Who told you

he was a friend of mine?' He leaned forward, planting his arms upon his knees, still very intent upon the fan. 'You haven't read his books, have you?'

'One of them. I bought it from a bookstall-boy as we travelled up to-day, and oh! Frank, it is a horrible book. But there is one little bit of description which is lovely, and I know you gave it him.'

'I gave it him?'

She nodded.

'That's how I know you must be dear friends, or you would never have told him. For it is our own old orchard, Frank, with the twisted tree near the centre, which we called the throne, just as he does there; and there is the gap in the hedge we wouldn't have mended. Don't you remember it? Oh, you must! Why, we used to sit there for hours, and plan all the grand things you were going to do. Reforming the world at large was one of our minor schemes, I rather fancy.'

'I remember,' said Digby shortly.

He would like to have added something contemptuous about the priggishness of the boy who used to lie under the apple-trees; but, with

Meg so full of her subject, the moment seemed somehow inappropriate.

‘You didn’t care for his book, then?’ he said, after a pause. “What was the matter with it?”

Her face flamed, and her lips parted as though the words would be a torrent. Then she checked herself, and looked away.

‘It is a bad book,’ she said quietly; ‘bad and disgraceful through and through. I hope he has not a mother. She would be so sorry!’

Digby thought of the stock arguments he had heard employed by other men, such as the demands of Art, and the glory of leaving the truth unshackled, and wondered idly if he should try their effect on Meg. Then he told himself she was too hopelessly provincial and narrow-minded to be worth the exertion, and besides—well, he wasn’t going to show himself too eager in his partisanship of Jason Smart.

‘Well, I will admit he is a bad lot,’ he said lightly: ‘as bad as you please. Now, let us drop him and his iniquities, and talk of something else. How long are you going to be at Cannes?’

‘Why do you let him?’ she demanded suddenly. ‘Don’t you remember the arguments

about Sunday-keeping you used to have with old Donald? You said a man might stay in his own room, and drink and swear and play pitch-and-toss all day if he liked, but he had no business to whistle even, because that might shock some passer-by.'

Digby's muttered answer was too low for her to catch.

'So I am to teach Smart he is not to propagate unholy thoughts,' he added presently, 'but that if he likes to think them he can. If he chooses to go to the devil, he is to go *solus*, eh?'

'Now I have hurt you,' she said contritely, 'because he is your friend. But even the bits I read of that book made me long to go away and bathe my eyes, because the words seemed to strike them. You know the feeling yourself, Frank. We talked it out over the Russian book you read that last Christmas.'

The rooms were growing hot, and the corridor filled slowly. Mrs. Trevor was pointed out, nodding and smiling at Meg as she passed, and a good many recognised Digby, while one or two women cut him dead.

'I suppose I am a brute to sit here with her,'

he thought, savagely; 'but I shan't go away and leave her behind to find out the truth. I wonder what she would say, and—yes, by Jove! I wonder what *he* would say.'

He knew him so well, this untried, chivalrous fellow of orchard days, that it was not very difficult to conceive the bluntly worded opinion, nor the vehemence with which he would express it. What a hot-headed fool the boy was! What a pragmatistical ass! Yet how genuine was his laughter, and how inextricably the old creeds and beliefs seemed mingled with the recollection of long grass and distant stretches of moorland. And the dream-castles ——

He roused himself with a sigh.

'What were you saying, Meg? I didn't hear.'

'Lamenting my bad manners. What an unsympathetic wretch you must think me! I haven't congratulated you yet on your marriage.'

'My ——' He hesitated, shut the fan very leisurely, and put it back into her hand. 'There, I know it will get damaged if I keep it any longer. Thank you, Meg. I didn't know news travelled so far. When did you hear it?'

'Dr. Bayne saw you both at the Lyceum one night, and heard a man speak to Mrs. Digby.

Tell me all about her, Frank. What is her name? Have you been married long? You might have written to us!’

‘I met her first six months ago,’ Digby said, slowly. ‘She is fair. Her name is Nettie.’

‘Is she here to-night? No? I am so sorry! And, oh! Frank, is she exactly like Lady Ideal?’

Digby looked blank. He had not been altogether sure of the identity of ‘Donald,’ but who on earth was ‘Lady Ideal?’

‘Now you have forgotten!’ she said quickly, and there was a distinct note of disappointment in her voice. ‘You have forgotten that poor battered old manuscript we once knew almost by heart.’

‘What? Those strings of platitudes you so patiently copied out for me—no, indeed, I haven’t. Lady Ideal! Let me see, she was the heroine, wasn’t she?’

Meg nodded.

‘And we almost quarrelled over her once, because she was so much sweeter and wiser than I! So I can picture your wife exactly, you see. The kind of woman that I am, but italicised, of course, and only to be described in superlatives.’

He was silent, eyeing her gloomily. The excitement of their unexpected meeting had added the touch of animation her serenity might otherwise have lacked, and had brought a tinge of colour to her clear skin. His moodiness increased. No other eyes met his with that honest friendliness and faith in him. No, they were not much alike.

The smile spread from her eyes to her lips, and she laughed outright.

‘You are wondering how to be truthful without being positively rude. Confess it, Frank,’ she said merrily. ‘Never mind. When we are back from Cannes we shall stay for at least a week in town, and I shall come and call and see for myself. Or would she rather——?’

She stopped abruptly, for Digby had risen to his feet.

‘Look here, Meg,’ he said hurriedly, ‘I must be off, for I have work to do, and I don’t choose to go away and leave you here. Will you let me put you in a cab now, or must we find the Trevors first and explain that you are going?’

She rose at once, a little bewildered.

‘The Trevors? Oh! they won’t mind. It was arranged I should go earlier if I liked, so as

to be rested for to-morrow's journey.' His look and tone perplexed her. 'What is it?' she asked.

'I can't go and leave you here,' Digby repeated doggedly. 'I will go back, if you like, when I have seen you off, and tell Mrs. Trevor you were tired. The men here would be pestering for introductions, and some of them you wouldn't care for. I can't explain, Meg; but they are a scandal-mongering set, and you wouldn't enjoy it. You can't stay here.'

He fetched her wraps, and as they went down the staircase together, they passed two or three men. They stared openly, in spite of Digby's scowls, and Meg noticed them.

'You are a tyrant to cut my evening short!' she said ruefully. 'But you always were a perfect dragon in your care for women, and I refuse to own I am grateful. Tell Mrs. Digby I quite sympathise with her.'

Digby started off home at a headlong pace. His face looked curiously white. Arrived there, he was greeted by the refrain of a French chansonette, to which he was obliged to listen, and ordered to applaud, before the singer was at liberty to greet him.

'Well,' she asked, 'did you come across

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Lucas? Just the old set, I suppose, or was there anybody fresh?’

‘I renewed an acquaintance,’ said Digby succinctly.

The girl spun round on the piano-stool, and laughed. ‘Pretty?’

‘Pretty?’ Digby sat down, suddenly realising that he was desperately tired; ‘oh, no; it was a boy.’

His companion looked at him oddly.

‘Have you seen a ghost, Frank? What is the matter? If you have anything to say to me, for pity’s sake say it, for you know how I detest mysteries. If I——’

He cut her volubility short by stretching a hand towards her. His mouth was a little drawn.

‘Nettie,’ he said quietly, ‘will you be my wife?’

THE HOUR OF HER LIFE

IT was at the beginning of last season that a flower-shop was started in the heart of Clubland, which, had it continued open, would have been town-famed long ere this. Instead of holding the orthodox stiff-backed chairs and counter, the interior was as prettily arranged a little nook as could be found in all London. Bits of old brocades and trailing plants covered the walls, and the stock-in-trade, which consisted exclusively of men's buttonholes, was dispensed by so beautiful a woman that she was able to make it a rule from the very first, that whatever might be the price of the flowers when sold by her two assistants, they doubled in value when touched by her own fair hands. Annette was the name over the window, and it very soon became 'the thing' with a certain section of society to lounge into the flower-shop on spring afternoons, and to waste a fair amount of time and money over the excellent tea (which was given

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gratis), and the purchase of flowers, whose perfection and cost put a certain *cachet* upon the customers. A favoured few were occasionally admitted into an inner sanctum, and this, though it was merely divided from the outer room by a curtain, it became the fashion to desire to enter. The place was fitted in Liberty's best style, the lounges were luxurious, and the object was flirtation.

The piquancy of it, such as it was, lay in Annette herself. A small, impudent-toned, rosy-faced girl would have vulgarised the affair at once ; it was so exactly what would have been expected. But Annette was a graceful, loose-limbed woman, whose complete indifference stood her in lieu of dignity, and whose absolutely colourless face, crowned by a mass of dyed auburn hair, to which only one man was so fastidious as to object, brought into greater prominence a pair of big changeable eyes, which were long-lashed, and of a perfect forget-me-not blue. Her manner was usually grave to sombreness, and, as Freddy Calvin averred, it was not altogether unlike making love to an iceberg. It being pointed out to him that this could scarcely be deemed a satisfactory occupation, he shifted

both his ground and his simile, and vowed it more resembled wooing an angel, and made him feel kind of churchy and good. And, besides, he never knew when she would snub him, and when fall in with radiant delight with his own plans; and this perhaps held the case in a nutshell.

One morning early in May, Mr. Freddy Calvin—heart-whole, strictly inoffensive, and heir to Lord Sydthorpe, he was registered in the match-makers' books that season—came strolling along Piccadilly in the glossiest of new hats, and the broadest of smiles. He was a young gentleman who was invariably on excellent terms both with himself and the world at large, and he thought the universe at that moment held no greater bliss than the knowledge he was going to Annette, and felt tolerably assured of his welcome.

'I shall marry that woman if she will have me,' he had said to Luke Felstead the night before, and it had left him totally unruffled that his friend had rudely replied: 'Then, my dear Freddy, the more fool you.'

Felstead was the one man who objected to Annette's dyed hair, and was also the mentor

who occasionally took Freddy to task. Farthermore, though this is a detail, he was the one man for whom Annette cared a rush.

Freddy reached his destination, and finding the shop empty but for the two little blue-gowned white-capped maids, begged one of them to find out if mademoiselle would admit him to the inner room. To brush past the curtain uninvited was more than the most courageous of the men would have dared.

'Mam'selle says "Please come in," was the message brought back, and Freddy, with sufficient delicacy to feel he should sink the trade in the courtship, left on the table the rose he had just purchased, and went in with alacrity.

Annette was doing some needlework, some lacey sort of stuff, but put it down at once to stretch a greeting hand towards him.

'I am so glad to see you!' and there was enough music in her soft tones to make the words sound not commonplace.

'It is downright good of you to let me come in,' responded Freddy heartily; he was barely of age, and his diction was still boyish. 'Is that a thing that wants holding, Annette? My cousin

Mary is always doing work that wants another fellow holding, and I'll do it for you at once. Uncle Sydthorpe is in town again.'

'Is he?' asked his hostess. Freddy's chatter bored her, because she knew there was so much of it she should have to sit through before he could be helped on to the one subject which interested her keenly, and of which only he could tell her.

To-day, however, her patience was less severely taxed than usual, for when he had continued discussing his relations for some minutes, he broke off abruptly to remark he had seen Felstead last night, and to quote his opinions anent his cousin Mary.

Annette's indifference vanished.

'What did you say he said of Miss Calvin?' she asked breathlessly.

'Oh, he admires her.'

'She is pretty?'

'Pretty?' Freddy whistled. 'No, she is plain, but Felstead cares nothing for looks. He likes a Vere de Vere individual, who would rather die than send you in to dinner with the wrong girl.'

Annette's laugh sounded forced.

'And I was studying up the Peerage last night to understand the carriage panels,' she said. 'Ah, well! it takes all sorts to make a world, doesn't it?'

'As if you weren't a whole century better than she in every way,' Freddy cried out indignantly. 'I only wish you cared half as much for yourself as I care for you, and then you'd die of self-love.'

'A pleasing ending,' replied Annette.

She spoke listlessly, for what was the use of it all, when everything she could learn of Luke Felstead tended to show the sharp line of demarcation he drew between women of his own class, and others? What was the use of enduring the society of this talkative lad, if it never brought her nearer his friend?

Freddy was going on in a more ardent strain now, not quite venturing on the intended proposal, but making as hot love as his honest heart and limited vocabulary would allow. Annette thought her own thoughts the while, and when they grew too bitter, dismissed him almost curtly.

Five minutes after his departure she caught the tones of another voice enquiring for her, a pleasant, full-toned voice this one, and as

courteous in its manner of addressing the white-capped maids as if they had been royal. Annette passed swiftly through the curtain, and confronted a grave-looking middle-aged man, with a pale pink flush rising slowly in her cheeks.

‘Yes, Mr. Felstead?’ she said.

The newcomer raised his hat. ‘I am an early visitor, but I thought I should find Freddy here,’ he explained, and his listener chose to construe his sentence into ; ‘Otherwise I should not have come.’

So she answered defiantly that he had been, and had stayed a long time, and all the while had a miserable knowledge that she would regret the words as soon as Felstead had left her.

‘I saw you last night,’ she continued.

‘And I you,’ he responded, ‘though I did not go in myself. I hope you liked the play?’

‘No. I was with Roger Bryant, and he always palls on me after a bit. You will ask me why I go with him then?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Felstead suavely. ‘I should not be so impertinent as to question your movements.’

Adding a good day, he went off, and Annette retreated into the inner room. Had she done

anything wrong? she asked herself, in a white heat of rage. No, she knew she had not, for ladies—real ladies—went out in the evening with men who were not their husbands: the society papers said so; so how dared he say in that distant polished voice: ‘Certainly not.’

The days went on. May came to an end, and June dawned amid all the sunny-houred fashion and fuss which inaugurates so much enjoyment, and disguises so much of tragedy. Annette had disposed of the amorous Bryant by snubbing him so effectually that that hero went flowerless for a week; and then, in the natural reaction from misery to annoyance, took to buying his buttonholes at another shop.

‘We were talking away in quite a friendly fashion,’ he informed his brother some months later, ‘when she told me suddenly I had gone too far, and must stop. I declare to you I was trying to be as agreeable as possible. As I didn’t at once well, what do you imagine this extraordinary woman did? She just rang the bell, and told one of her maids to stay in the room with us; and then she turned to me with the most beaming of smiles. “You were saying ——” she said sweetly.’

Bryant deposed, left Freddy Calvin an undisputed first, and a rare round of delight he had, in which the river and many theatres played prominent parts, and which were as innocent, and undoubtedly as enjoyable, as if they had been shared by the most lynx-eyed of chaperons.

At length came the day when Luke Felstead saw that if ever he intended to win Freddy from a not over-desirable influence, now was the time to do it. Why he interested himself in the young man, with whom he had but little in common, is not to be related here. It took its rise from a memory associated with his mother, and was an unwritten chapter of Felstead's lonely life. Enough that Freddy, left to himself, would inevitably drift downwards, and accordingly must be taken in hand at once.

So his mentor, with a vast amount of self-pity, for he hated interfering with other people's affairs, betook himself to Charing Cross in order to meet the train which brought up the two from a half day at Richmond, and there asked Annette, as simply as if it were not thoroughly alien to his ordinary line of conduct, if she would accord him an interview the following morning. It hardly required the demure 'Yes, I shall be

very pleased,' for her eyes shone for the moment, and the quick breath parted her lips.

'It is a sad waste of expression,' thought Felstead, half-contemptuously, as he watched her companion put her into a cab. 'What a flirt she is!'

Next morning Annette was up betimes. She wanted both herself and her room to look their prettiest, and he had not said at what hour he would call. But as the time dragged leadenly by, she was seized with a great nervousness, and was fit for nothing more than to sit trembling, with her ears strained to catch the first sound of his approach. He was coming to her of his own free will! The thought rang like a jubilant note of victory. She knew she was beautiful; she had but little vanity, but she could not help knowing that; had he grown to think so too?

Was he coming to her because her tactics of patient waiting had been crowned with success at last? Was her double endeavour never to force their possible friendship, but to learn of his desires through Freddy, and then be swayed by them, while at the same time she trusted he might be piqued by her apparent preference for another man,—was it to yield her happiness

to-day? She pushed up the hair which was growing damp with anxiety upon her forehead, and rubbed her hands to bring some warmth into them. Then—

‘Can I see your mistress? She is expecting me.’

‘Yes, sir, if you will go in to her, please,’ and Luke Felstead entered the room. The hour of her life had come.

‘Will you—will you sit down?’ she said, when the maid had pulled to an inner door behind the curtain, for he had not relinquished her fingers, but was looking at her gravely. ‘What is it?’ she added involuntarily.

‘I think it is good of you to see me,’ he told her, seating himself at some little distance, and scanning her as she stood before him, a straight motionless figure in her dark blue gown. ‘You do not know me at all well, and I have no right to ask it.’

She murmured something inaudible, and he continued—

‘Will you promise not to turn me out of the room, for I am going to be impertinent, and shall deserve it?’

Even had Annette been a novice in the hear-

ing of love vows, which she certainly was not, she would have taken heart from the direct personal tone of his words ; but she controlled herself, and answered him very quietly.

‘You have always been scrupulously careful, Mr. Felstead. Even if you were, as you say, “impertinent,” I would forgive you, now.’

She had dropped on to a couch with loosely-clasped hands and half-averted head. It made no impression on him, but having her here to himself, Felstead began dimly to comprehend somewhat of the fascination she might possess for younger men.

‘You are too young and too beautiful to be here by yourself,’ he said abruptly. ‘Haven’t you people of your own to live with?’

She shook her head.

‘My father was an officer—Lion Browning of the Guards ; perhaps you have heard of him—Mad Lion, they called him. He cut the service when he married my mother, and I was born in France. She sold oranges in Drury Lane ; and I have been told he was tipsy at the time. But I won’t think that. He was my father, and I like to think he was a gentleman, and be proud of him.’

Watching her kindling eyes, and the eloquent little gesture with which she flung back her head, Felstead thought so too.

‘I see,’ he said kindly. ‘And being your father’s child, you did not care much about your other relations.’

‘That was just it,’ she answered. ‘I went to my grandfather—his father, you know—once, and he turned me from the house. A low-looking man, I think he said he was a coster, found me out another time, and insisted he was my uncle, so I did the same friendly office by him. I am a sort of Mahomet’s coffin, Mr. Felstead, and hang between the two worlds without belonging to either.’

Felstead was silent. This explained much which had hitherto puzzled him.

‘I came to ask you a big kindness,’ he said at last. ‘I came to you yourself, direct, because if I can read faces at all, yours proves you are good-hearted. Are you fond of Freddy Calvin, Miss Browning?’

Annette hesitated.

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘Because I want you to give up the boy, and let him go.’

The woman's heart beat almost to suffocation. Was this tantamount to saying, 'that I may take his place?'

'Why?' she said again, and stopped short.

Then he told her. What he said was as delicately veiled as was compatible with absolute clearness; not by one expression or inflexion of his voice would he wantonly wound her; but the naked truth was unmistakable. A woman in her position, who had been fêted by a vast number of the fastest men in town; whose beauty had enabled her to sell flowers at fancy prices, and whose life generally since the opening of the shop had proved she was answerable to no one for her actions, was assuredly not the sort of woman to become the future Lady Sydthorpe. He did not fancy her affection could really have been caught by the errant fancy of a boy some year or two her junior. Would she not show herself capable of a great goodness, and break the chains which held him?

Annette heard him steadily to the end. A dull brickdust red had suffused her pale cheeks, and her eyes had darkened.

'I may not know the ways of your world,

Mr. Felstead,' she said when he had finished, 'but I am not a bad woman.'

The man flushed in his turn.

'You and I may not much like each other,' he told her, 'but if any man in my presence dared to say that you were, I would knock him down for a liar.'

Annette had set her teeth so hard, that it was with physical effort she unclenched them to answer him.

'Then why can't I marry him?' she demanded. 'Understand that I do not say I would, I do not say I care two straws about him. I only say, why shouldn't I?'

Her companion murmured something about an impressionable lad like Calvin wanting a wife who would hold him up, and not pull him down in the social scale; but Annette had risen to her feet, and broke in upon his words with a sudden passion and energy that made them fail upon his lips.

'Why should you try to spare your friend?' she cried. 'What have I done? My father's birth was as good as his own; you yourself admit that whatever I may do, it is in the open daylight; I am well favoured enough to have

won his love, and I have wit enough to keep it. I have got my own living, it is true, but is that a shame to me? When the men I know overstep the bounds of friendship, I send them away. I don't keep my discarded lovers dangling about me. Is that so much lower than the fine ladies of your own set? When the——'

What Luke Felstead might have answered had her impetuous ringing speech continued to its end, remained unspoken, for as the words came pouring forth as she stood fronting the man who, perfectly unmoved, perfectly courteous, listened to her, a chance remark of his which Freddy had repeated flashed through her brain. Felstead could only care for a woman who would 'rather die,' as the boy had phrased it, than commit the slightest social solecism, and this sudden remembrance tolled the death-knell to her hopes. She stood silent, and looked at him piteously.

'Could a woman of my class never make a man of yours happy?'

'Never,' said Felstead, firmly. 'There would be the same difficulty, Miss Browning, if you were a princess. To be happy the boy should marry in his own swim.'

‘Couldn’t my love for my husband do anything?’ Her voice was dangerously sweet, her blue eyes were liquid with tears she was too proud to shed. ‘It should teach me to sink my old life utterly; I would have no will nor aim but his.’

The face she was watching did not soften, and Annette drew back a step, as though the quiet figure had struck her.

‘I see. I am a fool,’ she said, and the pleading had died from her voice. Then: ‘You want me to send him away, Mr. Felstead? If I do, it will be to please you.’ She turned from him abruptly, and walking over to the mantelshelf rested her elbow on its ledge, her chin on her hand. ‘I wonder if I shall do it.’

‘To please me?’

Felstead rose from his seat, startled, bewildered. What did she mean?

‘Yes,’ said Annette, slowly, ‘you. I—I am whimsical, Mr. Felstead, and just because, as you say, we two don’t much like each other, I’ve a fancy—to be well thought of—by you.’ She spoke unsteadily, almost jerkily. ‘Come back to-morrow morning, will you, and bring Freddy with you? I,’ her fingers stole over her

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quivering mouth, and hid it from him, 'I will do what you want? Will you shake hands with me—now?'

That day the flower-shop was closed, and a neat placard affixed to its shutters, which the friends read next morning with a conviction on at least the elder man's part that the announcement meant for always. 'Gone away' was what it said.

THE FIFTH EDITION

HIS afternoon had not been a success. Miss Elliott, whom he particularly wanted to see, had not been 'at home,' which was the more vexing as she knew he intended to call; and an over-zealous friend had posted him a paper containing a paragraph which had greatly annoyed him, and which otherwise he might not have seen. So when he bethought himself that he was near Maxwell's rooms, he instantly resolved to look him up, and see if the young actor could not give him a stall somewhere or other for that night. He had an intense hatred of even a passing discomfort, and he wanted something fresh to think about.

Maxwell's rooms were in Museum Street, and Leyden had been in them so often, that when he found the street door ajar, he uncere- moniously pushed it open, and walked up to the second floor. Probably the small maid-of-all-work had gone to post a letter, or to a near

shop, and it was useless ringing a bell which would not be answered.

Once in the room the first thing that struck him was that Maxwell must have been tidying-up,—the next, that the transformation was too complete to be so interpreted. The numberless photographs which, grimed with dust, were wont to adorn the mantelpiece and the top of the hanging book-shelf which was always guiltless of books, were now conspicuous by their absence. The stacks of newspapers, which Leyden used to complain made locomotion difficult, had wholly vanished, together with the pipe-racks and the tobacco jars. The familiar furniture seemed set at more convenient angles, a few good engravings had been hung on the walls, and a work-basket yawned on the window-sill. On the table was a pot of daffodils, and a book. It was evident that Maxwell had at last fulfilled his weekly threat, and had betaken himself and his chattels elsewhere. It was equally evident that the room was now the property of a woman.

The intruder looked about him with approving eyes. It was all very quiet and restful, he thought, and the place had acquired a certain

self-respecting atmosphere which results from turning a lodging into a home.

Wondering idly what manner of woman she was, he had turned to go, when the whim seized him to glance at the name of the paper-covered volume she had been reading. *Franklyn Leyden* looked boldly up at him from the title-page. It was one of his own books.

Does one require to be abnormally vain to glean pleasure from so slight a matter? Leyden, at all events, being by temperament depressed or elated by trifles too insignificant to weigh with other men, was vastly pleased with his little discovery ; and when, farthermore, he noticed that some of his especially pet passages had been singled out for marginal marking, the thin lips, which the annoyances of the afternoon had drawn into a straight line, relaxed into their ordinary curves of weak good-nature. He felt that something pleasant was about to happen, when he caught the soft rustle of a woman's gown in the adjoining room, and when the folding-doors opened, and Maxwell's successor came suddenly upon her unexpected guest, he feigned a momentary unconsciousness of her presence.

She, for her part, gave a gasp of surprise, possibly of fright, and Leyden turned round instantly, hat in one hand, book in the other.

‘Pray forgive my intrusion,’ he began, in his most dulcet tones, though the situation lost most of its charm so soon as he faced her. She was old enough to have mothered the girl he had unwittingly pictured. ‘I came up unannounced to call on my friend Maxwell, who used to lodge here until quite recently. Can you tell me what has happened to him? I had no idea he had moved.’

She only stared at him instead of replying. Into her cheeks there came the slow-growing, lovely flush of a woman who has retained the pure colouring of her otherwise lost youth.

‘You are . . . You must be . . . Forgive me, but surely you are Mr. Leyden?’ she said, at last.

The tone hurried, then lagged, as the words stumbled over each other in her eagerness.

‘I have seen pictures of you . . . every one has seen them . . . and I love . . . I reverence your work. Won’t you . . . Won’t you stop a little while? It is not my fault I am not Mr. Maxwell.’

The glorious colour still flooding her face, and the ill-chosen, stammering words, were more than incense to Franklyn Leyden. It was for this he worked, and wrote, and had his somewhat indiscriminating being; it was for the attempt to baulk him of what he had grown to consider his due, that he could have strangled the paragraphist of that afternoon; and it was for the sake of her genuine hero-worship that he now forgave this woman her forty years and the lines on her careworn face, and cheerfully consented to do her bidding.

‘Not Maxwell? No; that is my good fortune,’ he assured her. ‘You will think me very impertinent if I tell you the truth, but I was so charmed with the peaceful little home into which I had wandered, that I was quite longing to see its owner. You are,’ he turned to the fly-leaf of the novel, ‘you are Miss Suttaby?’

‘Yes, I am Janet Suttaby.’ She still stood by the inner room where she had paused on first seeing him. ‘I will make enquiries about your friend. I know some gentleman left here on Saturday, and I think that was the name.’

‘We will find out presently,’ Leyden returned.

He put down what he was holding, and pulled forward a chair. 'Can't we have our talk first? It was curious, wasn't it, that you should recognise me? The pictures must be very like.'

She surveyed him gravely as he leaned back in his seat, a fair-haired giant with china-blue eyes, and large hands which were extraordinarily white and mobile. When they had nothing else to work upon, the left was habitually fingering the lappet of his coat.

'You are younger than I thought,' she told him.

She still looked at him as if he were some god who had dropped from another planet, but her nervousness was decreasing.

'What drew me first to your book was its deep knowledge of suffering. I thought you much older, to have lived through so much.'

'Perhaps I am, actually, if with Bailey you "count time by heart-throbs,"' he said gently, while inwardly he was cogitating as to 'what the deuce she meant.'

Nothing amazed him so much about 'Wrecked' as the number of times he had been told how he had suffered. He could only explain it as a

fresh witness to the extreme faithfulness with which he had reproduced that poor chap in Algiers of whom he had made copy.

‘ Tell me the especial points. Ah, yes, do tell me. Has sorrow visited you too ? ’

From the exceeding diffidence with which she answered him, he gathered that she had seldom been asked so directly personal a question. This was quite easy to understand, he acknowledged, for, now that the flush had gone, it was undeniable that Miss Suttaby was really a plain person. She was also uninteresting, which was worse, or at least he knew she would be found uninteresting by most people ; and he recalled Kingsley’s contention that it takes a noble soul to see beauty in an ordinary careworn face. For his own part, Miss Suttaby did interest him, and he found the pale face attractive.

She told him a little of her life,—the barest outlines merely, and even these were dragged from her, not indeed unwillingly, but as from one who was unaccustomed to talk of herself at all. Possibly she had never had time for our modern employment of thinking herself out, and appraising and cataloguing herself ; possibly no one had ever cared to listen.

She was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, who dying had left a second family to her charge, young, and cursed with the seeds of the lung trouble their mother had bequeathed them. Her life had been spent on these youngsters, whom she had tended, and watched, and slaved for, only to lose them one after another as they grew out of their teens. Bertie had lingered the longest, and Bertie had died last year.

Undoubtedly Franklyn Leyden made an admirable audience. Your good things might bore him, but your sad ones never, averred his friends, and in their whole-hearted enthusiasm they rarely noticed that all his kindnesses and all his consideration were called forth by what he saw, by what affected him personally. His best friend might be dying, and he would give him a wide berth for fear of a heart-ache; but if he came upon a little child who had tripped in the street, it would be impossible for him to pass it without attempted consolation. The child's wailing would have worried him else.

So betrayed by his curiosity in connection with the book into hearing something of the

troubles of this stranger, he was speedily and very genuinely concerned about them.

‘I am so sorry! So very heartily sorry!’ was his comment, and Janet Suttaby found herself murmuring grateful thanks.

She had recognised the sincerity of the tone, and few of us, thank God! question that deeper sincerity, or the lack of it, which the tone may hide.

By the time he went away they both felt that they knew more about each other than a dozen mere ordinary meetings could have told them; and if on her side at least this impression was quite wrong, that did not detract at all from its pleasure.

‘I shall come and see you again quite soon,’ he said, as they shook hands.

If he had been parting from Miss Elliott he knew he should have added, ‘if I may;’ but one soon catches the trick of how to bow from a pedestal, and with many men it is learned in an hour.

‘Thursday or Friday. H’m. Yes, I will come in on Thursday.’

It chanced, however, that Thursday, when it came, brought a pleasanter engagement, and it

was not until a day or two later that he went to Museum Street. The result of which alteration in dates was to teach him the means by which Miss Suttaby earned her livelihood. She wrote.

‘But not what *you* would understand by writing. There is no art about it,’ she said ingenuously, when he accused her of keeping the fact a secret. ‘I just string things together for bread and butter, and they take them in little cheap-looking papers of which you have probably never heard. Here is the latest.’

She pulled a weekly paper from under the pile of manuscript. It was one of the many serious-minded publications where religion, as understood by the particular sect the proprietor favours, is made palatable to every one but his staff.

‘They give me seven-and-six a thousand, and I generally have to alter one-third, while they cut out another,’ Miss Suttaby explained. ‘But I know it is foolish to mind, for if I were fit for the magazines I should be paid more of course.’

‘Meanwhile, you should not buy daffodils.’

‘I don’t in meat weeks. Daffodils mean bread and coffee; but I would rather. I am very strong.’

Leyden picked up the paper.

‘Do you mind if I have a cigarette? I will smoke and read this, and you shall get on with your work. You can’t before me? Oh, nonsense! I am going to make myself quite comfortable and at home, and you’ll get quite used to me in a minute or two.’

The story proved far better than he had expected. The plot was hardly worth the very inferior type in which it was printed ; but there were delicate little touches here and there in the working out, and a fair amount of originality was shown in the depicting of an old farmer who was represented in the rather blurred wood-cut as a London dandy in the prime of life. It was difficult to make the right amount of allowance for editorial restrictions, but if she were given a free hand she would do well, he decided. Possibly she might achieve something really fine.

Then, because the easy chair was comfortable, and to turn to his companion would have necessitated shifting his position, he left her to her writing for a bit longer, and began to think about his own affairs.

The book,—that confounded book!—how on

earth was he to get it written? Two years ago he had been one of that band of young men whose names and productions are apt to become indistinctly glorious under the generic title of that of 'our younger writers.' He had tried his 'prentice hand at some small plays preparatory to taking the dramatic world by storm when he should be in the vein; and he had turned out two books of verse which not only sold as poems, but sold well. His publisher, who had seen too many versifiers perhaps to be especially impressed by this one, always declared that the soft voice and the white gesticulating hands were more responsible for the success than were the lines themselves; but as he only aired these opinions in private no harm was done, and certainly it was no fault of Leyden's that his personality was a good advertisement. Added to these slender pillars was the solid background of press work.

This had been his modest position when he had written 'Wrecked,' but the book had dragged him several rungs up the literary ladder, and he was now a person whom a certain set of aspiring nobodies used to point out to each other at first-nights and other

society functions, and whom the real somebodies tolerated in a good-humoured fashion as a hanger-on who might speedily become one of themselves.

In other words, his first novel had contained such real promise that the majority were enthusiastic: the minority awaited fruition. They wanted to see what his second story would be like, said divers of the critics. If Mr. Franklyn Leyden were wise he would comprehend that 'Wrecked' could only make an ephemeral reputation. If he wanted it sustained he must follow it up with something more equally written, and of more strength.

With this verdict Franklyn Leyden perfectly agreed. Indeed, he went farther, and told himself precisely wherein lay his weakness. He could not create. No one seemed to have discovered this as yet, for his critical powers were good, and his receptivity enormous; but unless some such chance came to him as that which had come during his fortnight's stay in Algiers, he knew that the book the reviewers wanted would never get written. Of course, to use Miss Suttaby's phrase, he could 'string things together' to a required length, but he knew

perfectly that if he could not improve upon 'Wrecked,' it would be far better for him to leave well severely alone.

Recalling it all as he sat quietly smoking, and watching the opposite houses through half-closed lids, he felt as if he almost owed Ned Jermyn a grudge for having decoyed him into his present position. The poor fellow had been dying at the hotel, when a chance had brought the two together, and possibly because he was weak and companionless, but more probably because of the other's intense sympathy of manner, he had told Leyden his life.

'It is a bit tragic, isn't it?' he had asked, with the indifference which besets a man who knows he will soon have ended his difficulties. 'I started with the ten talents of the parable, but I've made an even bigger wreck of my life than the chap who had only one. You might do worse than tip me into one of your books some day, eh, Leyden?'

And Leyden, considering the wisdom of the self-mocking suggestion, had taken him at his word, and immediately upon his return to England, he had 'tipped' poor Ned Jermyn, with all his sins and sorrows, into manuscript,

and from manuscript they had emerged into print as soon after Jermyn's death as could be conveniently arranged. He had written it at a white heat, and the follies and the repentances . . . 'People always talk as if repentance implied remorse,' said the sick man querulously. 'I don't regret what I've gone through. I am only sorry I did not pull it off better;' . . . the darkened room, with the glaring sunlight outside glinting through a broken bit in the wooden shutters; the weary voice, and the inert hands, lying open on the coverlet, had all found faithful reproduction. Jermyn had been a lonely man, and reticent, so he said; and it was extremely unlikely that anyone who knew one side of his character, or one part of his life, would know anything of any other. An alteration of names and places afforded an extra safety, though after all, if the truth were discovered, it could not possibly matter to him, Leyden told himself. He had the man's permission, and everything depended on the fashion of narration. He did not think one iota the less highly of himself that purely original work was beyond him. It did not happen to be his especial forte, that was all. Only, of course, the lack of it was

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awkward, when it came to the question of a second novel.

‘Deucedly awkward!’ he repeated, mentally, and turned round at last to survey Miss Suttaby.

‘I am afraid you have finished some time ago. I seem to have missed the sound of your pen.’

‘Yes; some little time. I did not want to disturb you.’

He looked at her gratefully. He had always understood that women of the class from which she sprang put on their best clothes in which to receive guests, and that being taken by surprise rendered them miserable. Yet here was Miss Suttaby in the painfully shabby serge she had worn when he had first seen her; and it did not appear to occur to her to deplore the fact, or to conceal the ink-stain on her finger. Unwilling to relinquish his pre-conceived theories, he settled in his own mind that her mother must have come of gentle blood, and have married beneath her; while aloud he thanked her warmly for allowing him to be happy in his own way.

‘. . . This is quite a little haven of refuge. The restfulness of it makes me terribly selfish,’

he added, and watched to see if such obvious underrating of himself would bring a show of that lovely colour which had gratified him the time before. That she uttered no verbal disclaimer to vulgarise it, added to his pleasure. 'You look tired,' he said, solicitously, wondering the while what other chord he could touch upon to obtain so instantaneous a response.

Every man knows the satisfaction of telling a good story when he can confidently count upon an appreciative laugh ; and this feeling, which is perhaps mentally akin to the physical experience of a successful hunter, had been abnormally developed by Franklyn Leyden. It interested him if he were shut into a railway carriage with a complete stranger, to imagine of what mirth, for instance, or of what anger the man were capable ; and then he would back himself within a given time to test the aptness of his theorising. The result of which apparently harmless piece of vanity was that he had grown to look upon his fellow-beings as so many pegs on which to hang his own emotions through the skilful drawing out of theirs ; and it was largely owing to the fact that Winifred Elliott had declined to be viewed in this light, that their friendship had

recently betrayed a tendency towards friction. At one time he had had an idea of marrying her, since she was quite the nicest girl . . . as a rule that was, of course, not when she contradicted . . . whom he knew ; and in his heart he was attracted as strongly towards the class of ritual and ease and plenty, as are many of that class to the denizens of Bohemia. That idea had not died, though it was not prominently to the fore just at present, but meanwhile Miss Suttaby's 'reverence' made a pleasing change, and it fortified him in his resolution to give his girl-friend time to miss him, and then to write and tell him of the miss.

When Miss Suttaby owned that he was right, and that she was very tired, he proposed they should go for a drive, and, growing keener as she demurred, finally gained his way, and went out to fetch a hansom.

'You are good enough to think highly of me, so you must let me do some little thing to live up to the position,' he said, gaily.

His spirits had risen. He threw off all thought of his own worries, and of the unwritten book, and devoted himself to his companion.

'Can we go straight along Oxford Street?

Why, of course we can! I feel that, too, that there is no point in driving towards Hampstead, because one never walks there. In Oxford Street you can feel every inch of the way, "Ah, how often I have trudged you!" and your cab becomes a coach and four by comparison. . . . If you don't like the sunset glinting straight into your eyes, you must screw yourself into a sheltered angle. . . . You do like it? I am so glad, for, do you know, so do I! It seems to me as wicked to shut out the sunshine as the sound of a little child's laughter. The day is sure to come when you will pine for them both.'

Miss Suttaby drew a long breath. She seemed literally to be drinking in the soft spring breezes.

'I—I think this is *lovely*,' she said. 'I had never seen a famous writer until I saw you, and—please don't laugh!—I have never been in a cab until this afternoon.'

'Never been in a cab?'

'Not a hansom. When Bertie and I first came to London we took a four-wheeler to our lodgings, because of the luggage, and since then it has always been omnibuses or walking.'

'Nor seen a writer?'

She shook her head.

‘Except in the Reading-Room perhaps, but then I did not know who they were.’

‘Well, I never!’ Leyden’s astonishment vented itself in a prolonged stare. ‘Miss Sutaby, we must positively shake hands at once. You are more refreshing than April itself. I am glad that the cab, at all events, is a good specimen of its kind.’

She hardly heard him as she leaned forward in undisguised enjoyment.

‘How mauve the pavements look against the road. I never noticed that before. And aren’t there quantities of flower-sellers? I wish I could give them, or someone, a happy hour in return for the one you are giving me.’

‘You shouldn’t wish that. You should just enjoy it.’

She looked round at him with a little laugh. It was the first he had heard from her, and it was musical.

‘You are joking. The cream of the pleasure is the passing it on. To-night I shall go upstairs to a sick girl on the top storey, and tell her of the colouring, and the wind which blows to-day as it used to blow over our fields. And of how it feels to be in the streets, and yet not

to be tired, and not to be intent on getting somewhere else.'

'And of me?' asked Franklyn Leyden. 'See! We are nearing the park. Shall you tell her of me?'

It seemed a trick of Miss Suttaby's that she seldom answered questions which patently answered themselves. Her candid eyes spoke instead.

Later on, by way of amusing her, he began to talk of his fellow-workers, but this was hardly a success, and Leyden instantly felt that it was so, and desisted. He did not want to set them also on little pinnacles in her estimation, or his own height might thereby be lessened; and he could not tell her anecdotes, which, though possibly true, hardly tended to present them in a heroic light, when she met the attempt with such hurt wonderment.

'But *you* could not think that. You must be quoting. You always see the best in everybody.'

He was nettled, albeit flattered.

'We may raise an altar to Art, Miss Suttaby, but neither you nor I can insist that only the worthiest shall be altar-servers. Many of them have shirked their apprenticeship, and

the consequences are as disastrous as I tell you.'

He was not quite sure what he meant, though he thought it sounded well. But he had often found that women made a beautiful translation from a very imperfect original, and he waited for her answer, knowing it would furnish the keynote to what she believed she had discovered in him.

'Yes, I see,' she said thoughtfully. They were on their return journey by now; the sunlight had faded and the wind was growing chill. 'You mean that unless Life has taught you servitude at her other altars,—at those of duty and self-sacrifice, and conquered longings, perhaps especially,—one should not dare approach to the high altar of Art. Of necessity one would have no fruits to lay upon it. Yes, it is a beautiful idea, and I quite see what you mean.'

'Exactly,' said Franklyn Leyden.

After that he saw her continually, since one must have somewhere to spend odd hours, and the friendship grew apace. From the first she had interested him, and the interest deepened as he formed whimsical theories concerning her.

Physically, he knew she was ageing long before her time. For her there would be no

Saint Martin's summer to her days, when the audacities of youth should mellow into a middle age, which to many is as captivating, and to all far more gracious. Here there would be no tender dalliance with Time, for pressing anxiety and sharp actual need were already drawing upon her those gifts of furrowed cheeks and full-veined hands which he usually holds in patient reserve.

Yet this was merely physical; while in startling contrast to it, there looked out at him through the steadfast eyes, with their environing network of wrinkles, the girlish soul which circumstance had never allowed to grow.

The fancy proved arrestive. She had never had a lover in her life,—she told him so simply when the subject in its generalities came up between them one day in talk,—and the amazing candour of her gaze confirmed this statement. No woman's eyes, or so Leyden complacently told himself, as one who was a past master on such matters, no woman's eyes could have retained such absolute simplicity if they had ever dealt in the coquettish glances of youth, or had ever tried, and failed, to meet their lover in the first shy stages of her wooing. Something

of the old sweetness and the old pain would always linger, ran his silent communings, and memories would make them their abiding place.

Despite the stretch of years between them, the temptation assailed him to flash into those eyes the love-light their serenity had never known, but strong though it was, he resisted it, applauding himself immensely for his self-denial, and offering a pious thanksgiving that he 'was not blackguard enough' to initiate so absorbing a study. After all, his judgment may not have been so wrong, for when all is said and done, such a matter is probably one of degree, and being the man he was, that he still contrived to leave her peace undisturbed, may doubtless be counted unto him for righteousness.

On other points he held there was no need for scruple. There must be a multitude of tones in her voice which had never been brought out, and which corresponded to the capacities in her which lay dormant. There must be a whole gamut of delicious laughter which with her lay dumb, but which with other women stretches from the soft cooing of babyhood to the suppressed chuckle of quite old age. Had she ever laughed from a gleeful sense of pulsing blood?

or because skies were blue and grass was green ? She never seemed to have had any individual existence at all, since with her it had always been bound up with and dominated by 'the others.'

Leyden set himself to liberate the imprisoned powers, and was rewarded in a fashion which was quaintly refreshing. It was as if one should rescue withered roses of a bygone summer from between the pages of an old book, and placing them in water, should find them suddenly a-bloom with fragrance and beauty.

It was about this time that he asked her if she would care to show him any of her manuscripts. He might possibly be able to procure her better payment than she usually received. At all events he could try. He made the offer in pure good nature, but was secretly dismayed and inclined to back out of it, when she handed him a tattered pile of foolscap with the remark that she had submitted it to all the papers for which she worked, but that they would not even accept it on the ordinary terms of cutting and scoring what they pleased, and merely paying for the mutilated remainder.

'I am afraid it is very long ; but if they took it as it is, it would mean ten pounds, and . . .'

‘I understand,’ said Leyden, kindly. ‘I’ll try to read it to-night; and you must not feel depressed about it. You are so absurdly humble-minded that it is quite possible you have not soared high enough in your efforts to place it, and that that is the reason it always comes back. Good-bye, Miss Suttaby. I will let you know very soon.’

That he did not redeem his promise, or indeed go near her for the next week, was due in both cases to not knowing what to say. He had begun the reading with scant interest, and with his mind reverting to the old farmer whom the woodcut had transmogrified, but speedily his attention was enchained, and, though her hand was not easy to read, he did not put down the manuscript until he had arrived at the last page.

‘There is no art about it,’ Miss Suttaby had said long ago when describing her writing, and he recalled her words now as a peculiarly apt criticism.

There was no art about it at all. She had produced no book before, and probably, if he could judge aright, and he thought he could, she would never produce one again. She had

simply obeyed a forgotten mandate, and with perfect literalness. She had looked into her own heart, and written of what she found there, and what she wrote of was a great loneliness.

Her heroine was a deserted wife whose baby had died,—a woman who had revelled in intense happiness, who had passed through the first anguish of its loss, and who then had gone on enduring a twilight sort of existence, in which neither the one nor the other could ever touch her poignantly again. Her warmest greeting was at arm's-length now, being just a friendly hand-clasp instead of the old wealth of kisses, and this was typical of the changed attitude of her world. Everything was at arm's-length and never came right up to her, not even Death.

It was a miserable book, and in the latter part of it there was no relief, except that which was afforded by delicate little descriptions of country, where the wind seemed to blow as invigoratingly as she had said it blew over certain fields near the old home. But in spite of this monotony, and of the poverty of its construction, sometimes even of its language, it was a powerful book, because it bore so plainly the impress of truth.

Leyden returned to it again and again.

At first he refused to own to himself that his long doubt as to where his second novel was to come from, was now practically solved. He locked the thing away from him, and spent a day in strenuous efforts to forget it. With the evening he had an idea which he dignified to the height of an aspiration, since it allowed him to run riot on a line of thought which otherwise must have stayed debarred. He would have another look at the story, he decided, and amuse himself by arranging in his own mind what he would have done with it if Miss Suttaby had died and bequeathed it to him for his personal property. He would alter the position of the chapters for one thing, and work up two or three of the minor characters to something more imposing than their present shadowy condition. Towards the middle he might possibly interpolate that odd experience of his last year at the Hague; though he was not quite sure of this, since, though the book wanted lengthening, it must be done with the utmost delicacy. And certainly he would cut out one or two of the passages where the pathos of the loneliness of the woman was, to his thinking, much overstrained.

For example, one could hardly ask one's readers to accept the notion of a woman who was otherwise sane taking a roll of baby clothes to bed with her in lieu of the dead child for whom she roused herself by feeling in her sleep; and though she might conceivably prefer to starve herself rather than omit the buying of certain flowers at certain given seasons in memory of birthdays and the like, did it not border upon the ridiculous to imagine she would always soil two cups in the solitary tea-drinking, rather than see only the one upon the board, and wash up only the one when the meal was over?

For the rest there was but little to suggest; and again reminding himself that the whole thing was farcical in the extreme, and a whimsical impossibility which he was concocting for his private amusement, he finally put down the manuscript and began devising imaginary reviews.

Naturally, what would strike the critics most would be his extraordinary versatility. Between 'Wrecked' and this story, which was as yet unnamed, but which he should entitle 'The Loneliness of a Woman,' the difference of their style and treatment would be amazing. That

had been largely incident,—Ned Jermyn's voice recurred to him, and the weak chuckle with which he had congratulated himself on the fulness with which he had packed his life: this was almost wholly introspective, for even the sins of the husband, of which much more might have been made, were touched upon very lightly, since to the woman's purity they were unknown, save for results.

There was only one quality which, the reviewers would point out, largely dominated both books; and that . . . a smile stole over Franklyn Leyden's lips, and his hand hugged the lappet of his opened coat . . . that was his enormous sympathy with suffering.

Heigh—o! He stretched out his arms, and rose with a sigh. What was the use of such roseate dreams? The manuscript which had so enthralled him was not his, but hers. She should . . . He hesitated a moment, disputing the word his imagination had supplied. Enthralled? Had it enthralled him? Was he not really enthralled of the book as he would have made it, rather than of the book as it actually was? Now he came to think of it, she would probably have great difficulty in getting it published.

She was unknown, for one thing : those who had already seen it had rejected it : it was crude and unusual. It was highly probable no one would take it, and it was more than probable that if they did, she would never make a penny by the transaction. Whatever its merits, it was undeniably a book to enhance a reputation rather than make one.

He felt that the ground was a good deal cleared by the time he arrived at this conclusion. Naturally, he must think only of what was best for her ; and it was very evident that to drop himself out of the matter would be very far from best for her. Yet, how to work it? He spent more than a week in indecision ; but his thoughts were not occupied with how he was to make the story his own, and yet be enabled to repeat his thanksgiving anent blackguardism. They were solely concerned, he told himself daily, with the consideration of Miss Suttaby's interests.

'We must collaborate,' he told her, when at length he betook himself to the dingy rooms in Museum Street. 'Your story is much too good to be lost ; and I should think . . .'

Miss Suttaby did not wait for him to finish his sentence.

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‘Collaborate?’ She uttered a joyful, quivering cry. ‘You and I! Oh, Mr. Leyden, you must be joking! Why, it is like , , , like . . .’

All kinds of impossible similes presented themselves. It was like the sun-god asking a buttercup to ally its yellow gleams to his own. It was like . . . Oh! she did not know. She threw up her hands helplessly. Her eyes lost their gravity, and shone in bewildered excitement.

‘Why not?’ said Leyden quietly.

It was a pity her voice should have failed her just then, since she had seemed on the brink of a gratifying compliment. How extraordinary it was with this woman that her emotions seemed constantly getting in her way.

She had not even an elementary idea of using them gracefully, and if she ever cried, he felt convinced that instead of tears ‘like summer showers,’ she would blot and blur her face in a manner which would be quite sufficient to alienate sympathy.

‘You don’t think it would be to our mutual advantage?’

Miss Suttaby laughed.

‘No, I don’t,’ she said bluntly. ‘If you really think there is any good in it . . .’

‘I really do.’

‘. . . it must either go back to the drawer until I have time to polish it, or . . .’

‘You mustn’t do that,’ Leyden cried sharply. ‘You would spoil it. It is perfect as it is.’

Then he remembered that this was not what he had intended to say, because, of course, he did not think it.

‘I mean, it is its unconsciousness which is its charm. You would only bungle it if you attempted improvement. But what is the alternative? “Or,” you said.’

‘Or you must take it,’ said Miss Suttaby, quietly.

Leyden brought both his hands sharply down upon the table.

‘Take it? What do you mean?’

‘I mean, if there is anything worthy of your acceptance, please accept it.’

Leyden’s charm of manner was somewhat apt to evaporate when one came to know him well. When he had taken a friend’s soundings, or believed he had taken them, and when in consequence his interest was upon the wane, quite

unwittingly he saved himself for newer work. But those demurely spoken words brought it back with redoubled intensity.

‘Miss Suttaby!’ He leaned across the narrow table, and took one of the fast-ageing hands in both his own smooth ones. ‘This is one of the most beautiful gifts I ever had in my life. The thought, I mean, not the story itself, for of course I would never take that. How good of you! How infinitely gracious! I—I really don’t know what to say to you, you kindest of friends. You have robbed me of words.’

His warmth made her uncomfortable. She tried to withdraw her hand, and uneasily shifted her chair an inch or two.

‘Robbed me of words!’ murmured Leyden.

He wished she had not robbed herself of words as well. He would have liked her to look up at him with eyes becomingly humid, and tell him—what was indeed the truth—that he had done more for her, both in his book and in his friendship, than she could ever hope to repay. But as she said nothing of this, he was again obliged to break into ecstasy, grateful that he, at least, formed an appreciative audience to himself.

‘Your generosity will make one of the red-letter days of my life. Your sweet sympathy . . .’

He paused. One cannot talk of sympathy to a woman who apparently does not want to listen. He released her hand.

‘Miss Suttaby, let us strike a bargain. You say you are averse from collaboration. Probably you feel as I do, that it is not quite honest work. But let me strike a bargain with you. Let me buy this story from you out and out, and put it to what use I like. I think you said you might get ten pounds for it. I will give you thirty.’

‘That would buy a head-stone,’ Miss Suttaby said irrelevantly. She was oblivious of the fact that it would also buy bread and butter. ‘I promised Bertie. He thought that just a grass mound looked like a labourer’s at our home. Mr. Leyden, I know it is too much, but since you will not take it as a gift, why . . . Bertie . . .’

Leyden was as kindly as ever. He talked away her scruples, and shared her tremulous delight, and it was only when he was upon his feet, and saying good-bye, that he referred to the tale.

‘I must cut a good deal, I am afraid. Now

Huldah cuddling those baby-clothes in bed, weren't you drawing a *little* too much on your imagination, eh, Miss Suttaby?'

She did not answer him at once, and accustomed as he had grown to her unaccountable fits of confusion, he could not but be struck by the paling cheeks and downcast eyes.

'One gets worked-up, and forgets probabilities, I find. But frankly it did not strike me as reading quite sanely, you know.'

'I . . . I think a woman might, if her arms felt *very* empty,' said Miss Suttaby.

Her voice sounded oddly muffled.

'Good-bye,' said Leyden suddenly. 'Write to me if I can ever be of the slightest use to you, won't you? You promise? That's right! Good-bye.'

So it was she who had done that thing which he had branded in his own mind as preposterous! To women of her temperament, at least, it would read as supremely natural, and he was bound to confess that she had so amazed him that for aught he knew to the contrary they might form the generality. From that choked tone he had gathered much. Undoubtedly it was she, too, who had resorted to the ghastly fashion of pre-

paring the solitary meal as if it were for two. He had been stupid, indeed, to think she could have evolved these and similar passages, when he knew her imagination to be so strictly limited. He would not cut a single line.

Next day he sent her ten pounds, with a promise of the remainder when the book should be out. He told her candidly he could not afford the whole of the amount at one fell swoop; and since he was invariably thoughtful in such matters, he tore up the cheque which she might have had some difficulty in cashing, and sent her notes instead.

Then he set to work in good earnest. Huldah should be no mere book-heroine, she should live. So far as he knew, the portrayal of a woman had never been done before in the only way in which fidelity is likely to be secured. She had never been drawn first by one who has suffered the actual suffering, and enjoyed the actual joys, and then by a second who has noted the visible results. She had never been the joint work of a woman dealing with the subtleties a man could not divine, and of a man writing of what a woman never notices.

He built upon Miss Suttaby's foundations,

and for the purpose of keeping the work all of a piece and devoid of scrappiness, his material was Miss Suttaby herself. The narrowness and the pathos of the narrowness, the arrested growth of the gentle soul, her simplicities of movement and talk,—nothing of what he had observed escaped transmittal. He told himself she would never recognise her own portrait, and probably in this he was right, since people are mostly ‘unexplored Africas’ to themselves. Ask any ordinary person how he cuts the loaf at breakfast, and he will gape in speechless ignorance. He has not the faintest idea if he jumps to his feet and saws away energetically, if he produces dainty symmetrical slices, or attacks the first corner that presents itself. All that makes the homely act individual to the onlooker, has never struck the actor at all.

No, no, he would be quite safe, or he would not risk wounding her for the world. And with all the reverence of which he was capable he went steadily on his way, until ‘her book’ grew into ‘the book,’ and then to ‘mine.’ The last stage naturally saw its completion.

The following autumn and early winter found

one man, at all events, blissfully content. Franklyn Leyden's new book had scored an immediate success, and the incense of adulation enveloped him in its clouds. It included, amongst other items, better business terms than he had expected, and a widely-advertised engagement to Lady Elliott's daughter, with whom he had long ago smoothed over old differences.

Once only had he heard from Miss Suttaby. She then wrote to tell him she had been ill, and unable to work. Would it be inconvenient to him to let her have at least a little of the money he had so generously promised? She gave a fresh address; two rooms were beyond her means.

Leyden was touched, and wrote back effusively, enclosing a couple of sovereigns. These were nothing to do with the sum she mentioned, he explained, but just a token of sincere friendship, which he begged her to accept in the spirit in which it was offered. In regard to what she asked, most certainly. He was only waiting until his royalties should have accumulated to allow of sending her a good round sum. It was all nonsense to refer to the paltry amount they

had arranged: fifty pounds would be far nearer the mark. He could never forget the gift she had wished to make him, and was exactly as grateful as if he had thought it right to accept it.—Remaining, 'ever faithfully,' hers.

He found it such an expensive matter to be even contemplating marriage, that the carrying out of these benevolent intentions was unavoidably delayed; and when one day the post brought him a second appeal, he felt deservedly provoked. To worry him at such a time, after all he had done, and was still doing, for her, surely showed a lamentable lack of consideration.

So he left the pencil-written note severely unanswered, fixing in his own mind the publication of the fifth edition of the book as a suitable time for writing again to his whilom acquaintance, and for settling the matter once and for all. It would be out in a week or two.

He kept his word on the very day of its appearance, and went to call on her personally, remembering what pleasure it would give her to see him again, and wondering if she would greet him with that lovely slow-growing flush.

The month was April, and the sight of the

flower-sellers in Oxford Street reminded him of how she had once longed to share with them her own exceeding happiness, and what an important event she had made of a cab drive. He must see how the time went, but if he could possibly manage it, he would ask her to come out with him for another drive to-day. Such trifles pleased her.

He had so vividly pictured the delighted surprise with which she would recognise her visitor, that on reaching his destination he was considerably taken aback at being informed she had 'gone away.'

Yes, she had gone away from London altogether. And, no, she had left no address. On these two points the grim-visaged woman was certain, and as she was the 'missus' of the house, as she carefully stated several times, who should be certain if not she herself? she 'ud like ter know.' She eyed him suspiciously the while, wondering what on earth he wanted with 'that Miss Suttaby;' wondering, too, if he took her to be 'flat enough' to admit to her lodger having died, especially when the alleged cause of 'practical starvation' was so humiliating for any respectable landlady.

‘I wish I could ’elp you, sir, but I can’t.’

Leyden thanked her courteously, and went away much crestfallen. The saving to his pocket he did not weigh for one moment against the hurt to his feelings. That she should have gone and not told him ! He could not understand it.

Presently his mortification faded into a kindly pity. She was piqued, he supposed, that he had not instantly replied, and had therefore adopted this extraordinary method of punishing him, heedless of the fact that she was also punishing herself. Well ! well ! How like a woman !

Here a passing carriage distracted his attention. By the time he reached home he was full of other thoughts. The whole episode had been too insignificant, and the heroine of it too homely to cut an enduring niche in his memory. Clearly it was no fault of his that she had chosen to drift out of his life.

So he simply forgot her.

It is probable that this is exactly what Miss Suttaby would have wished.

John Lane

The Bodley Head

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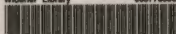
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